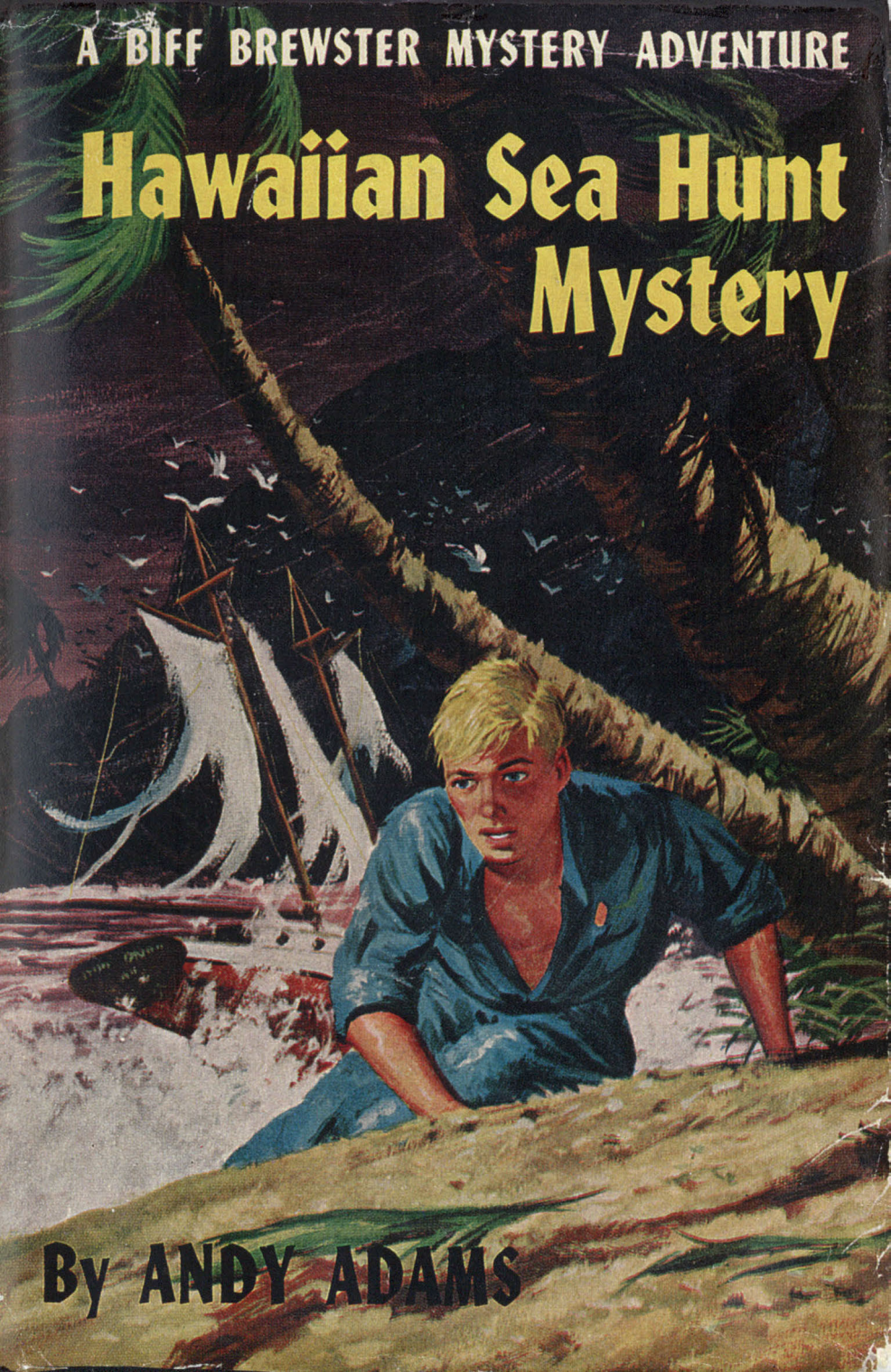
A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE

Hawaiian Sea Hunt Mystery



By ANDY ADAMS

A Biff Brewster Mystery Adventure

HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

By ANDY ADAMS

WHY is Biff Brewster's father so eager to leave for Hawaii? Is there more than just a mining engineers' conference afoot? The elder Brewster is strangely silent, and Biff can only guess at the cause of his father's sudden anxiety.

In this third exciting mystery adventure of the BIFF BREWSTER series, the entire Brewster family flies to festive, exotic Honolulu where a startling newspaper headline involves Biff and his father in a hair-raising race to locate a kidnaped scientist, a sunken sloop, and a cache of precious Cesium, a rare mineral essential to rocket propulsion and the conquest of the moon.

With the help of his new friend, Likake Mahenili, Biff soon learns that more than sharpened wits are necessary to defeat the mysterious forces working against them. The cunning of a ruthless rival engineer and the violence of the reef-filled waters off the islands combine to challenge the courage and stamina of the boys. Likake, an expert swimmer and diver, teaches Biff the skills he will need to protect himself against the defiant winds and tides which already have claimed the life of one colleague.

A vitally important scientific project and a life are at stake as Biff Brewster and his father crash headlong into the danger and breath-taking suspense of their adventure in Hawaii.

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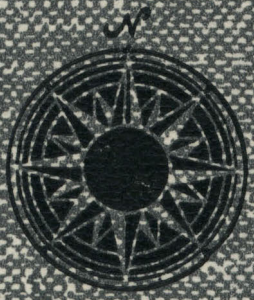

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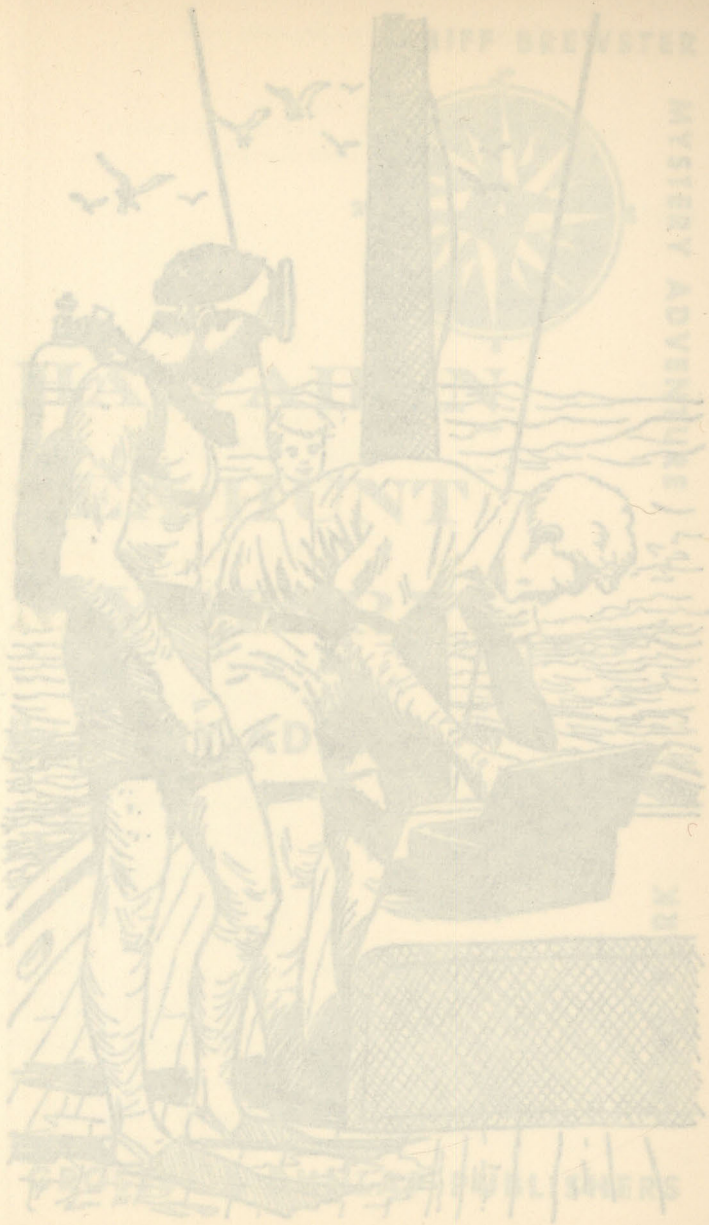
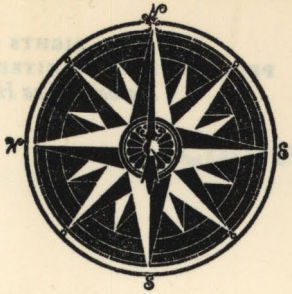


"This is it. It's got to be."

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE



HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

By ANDY ADAMS

NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP PUBLISHERS

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Hawaiian Sea Hunt Mystery

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HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

Peril in Paradise

IN THE tropical, jungle-like garden behind the hotel, a man stood absolutely motionless. The broad trunk of the coconut palm tree behind which he lurked protected him from being seen by anyone on the hotel's wide, sweeping porch.

The tense set of the man's features showed his growing impatience.

The broad porch ran around all four sides of the white, sprawling Royal Poinciana Hotel on Waikiki Beach, in Honolulu, Hawaii. The porch was called the "deck," and it had been designed to resemble the promenade deck of an ocean liner. It was an open

porch, or deck, with brightly colored floral-patterned umbrellas spreading welcome shade. The deck was spotted with lounge and captain's chairs, and its teakwood floor was marked off at regular intervals with shuffleboard courts.

The fore deck, that part of the porch running across the front of the hotel, overlooked the beautiful beach and its rolling, coiling breakers. Chairs and tables scattered on it were occupied by people waiting for the noon meal. On the rear deck, overlooking the carefully planned, luxuriant jungle-garden, only one couple could be seen.

"Will they never leave?" the man muttered to himself. He looked at his watch, then carefully peered around the tree, looking up at the deck jutting out from the hotel's second floor.

Just as he did so, the couple got up from their chairs and walked leisurely away, heading for the other side. The man waited until they rounded a corner and were out of sight. Then he moved swiftly.

His linen-clad figure was a white flash against broad green leaves as he dashed for the steps leading up to the now unoccupied porch. Once on the deck, he moved casually, as though he were just another tourist. He walked softly on crepe-soled shoes, making not a sound.

Nearing the center of the porch, the man pressed his back against the white-painted wall, almost blend-

ing into it except for his dark, swarthy face. Now he moved sidewise, crab-like, until he reached a partly opened latticed door. He stopped, pressing his head against the slight crack where the door was hinged.

Moments passed. Then he heard the sharp jangling sound of a telephone ringing from within the room beyond. Next he heard the soft pad of feet on thick piled carpet as the room's occupant crossed the floor to take the call.

Now the prowler abandoned his extreme caution. He looked through the partly opened door. He saw the back of a man sitting at a telephone table. The prowler carefully pulled the door open and slipped into the room. Its occupant had the phone's receiver to his ear.

"On your call to Mr. Thomas Brewster in Indianapolis, Indiana, sir," the operator was saying, "they are ringing that number now."

The prowler crept closer until he was within an arm's length of the seated man.

"Yes," the man said into the telephone. "I'll hold the line." With his free hand he pulled a well-used pipe from his jacket pocket and stuck it in his mouth. Then he patted the table for matches. He opened a drawer and felt in it.

The prowler watched his prey anxiously. He was an old man, with shaggy white hair hanging down almost to his collar.

Unable to find a match, the old man had just started to turn when the operator spoke again.

"This is Honolulu, Hawaii, calling Mr. Thomas Brewster," she said. A few seconds passed. "Here's your party, sir."

The prowler stood there, arms raised, the fingers of his cupped hands spread like talons just over the old man's shoulders.

CHAPTER II

A Disturbing Call

"I'LL get it! I'll get it!"

It was the voice of eleven-year-old Monica Brewster.

"You always do," grumbled her twin brother Ted. "I never do get to answer the telephone. Not when *you're* in the house."

Monica wasn't listening. She was flying into the kitchen to answer the steady ring before her mother could lift the phone from its cradle. Mr. Brewster's study was nearer, and there was a telephone in there, too. But Monica knew that her father was in the study, talking to her older brother Biff. She was sure the call was from her friend Betsy, because Betsy

generally called her about five o'clock in the afternoon. Monica didn't want her father interrupting her talk with Betts. Daddy didn't approve of long phone gabs.

Moments later, Monica came bursting through the living room. Her excitement was at a pitch as high as her voice.

"Daddy! Daddy! The call's from Honolulu! Someone's calling you from Honolulu!"

"Take it easy, sis, or you'll explode." Biff grinned as he saw the eagerness on his sister's flushed face.

Thomas Brewster picked up the telephone. He listened briefly, then cupped his hand over the mouthpiece and spoke to his older son.

"Close the door, Biff. *Behind* your sister."

Biff got up from his chair and gently ushered Monica, protesting, out of the study. When he turned back, he was startled to see that an expression of worry clouded his father's face.

"Yes, Johann, I agree." Mr. Brewster gave the name its Germanic pronunciation, "*Yohann.*"

Biff could only distinguish a mumble of words coming from nearly four thousand miles away.

"Well, Johann, don't you take any chances yourself," Mr. Brewster continued. "Wait until I get there . . . Danger? There's always danger when the stakes are as high as those we're playing for. . . . What!" Thomas Brewster's frown deepened. "Perez Soto?

You say Perez Soto is there? I don't like that one little bit. The letter, though, you have that safely hidden?"

Again the speaker at the other end took over the conversation. Biff could hear only a scramble of sounds coming from the telephone. He saw his father nod his head absently. His brows knitted into deeper thought.

"You think your room was searched?" he exclaimed. "Had you hidden the letter?"

Biff watched his father intently. Mr. Brewster listened attentively to a long reply. At last he said, "That's bad, Johann. Very bad. We'll have to make the best of it, though. All right, Johann . . . Yes, leaving here tomorrow . . . Northwest Airlines . . . Take off from Seattle early the next morning, Wednesday, at five A.M. Be in Hawaii about eight o'clock your time . . . You're stopping at the Royal Poinciana, aren't you? . . . Hello . . . hello . . . Johann?" Thomas Brewster waited a few moments. "Hello . . ." Then he hung up and turned to Biff. "That's funny. He didn't answer. Maybe we were cut off."

"Maybe the three minutes were up," Biff suggested with a smile.

"That's not as funny as you think, my boy," his father chuckled. "Dr. Weber's a peculiar man about some things having to do with money. A call from

Honolulu to Indianapolis means nothing to him. But if the operator told him his three minutes were up, he'd hang up quickly. He obeys what he thinks are the rules."

Biff laughed. "Isn't Dr. Weber the famous scientist? I'm sure I've heard you speak of him."

"That's right, Biff. He's a staff consultant for Ajax. I've worked with him before."

Biff nodded his head. "I thought so."

Thomas Brewster was the chief field engineer for the Ajax Mining Company, headquarters Indianapolis, Indiana. His job took him all over the world, to many of the strangest and least known spots on the globe. Whenever it was possible, he took sixteen-year-old Biff along.

"One of my reasons for going to Hawaii is to meet Dr. Weber," Biff's father continued now.

"You mean the Engineers' Conference isn't the main reason?" Biff asked.

Thomas Brewster shook his head. "No. Oh, the meeting is important, all right. But I doubt if I would have gone out there for that alone. Dr. Weber wrote me over a month ago. Said he wanted to meet with me and Jim Huntington. He said it was very important. But he didn't go into details. I imagine he didn't want to put too much information on paper. Afraid it might be seen by eyes other than my own."

Biff was thinking. "It seems to me, Dad, that I've

heard you mention this Mr. Huntington before, too. Am I right?"

"Probably. I hadn't heard from Huntington for a long, long time. But he did some work for me in the past."

"What's going on, Dad? And what was all that about a letter?"

Thomas Brewster sighed. "Oh, the letter. Forget you *ever* heard about it. Dr. Weber told me Jim Huntington was lost at sea sailing up to Hawaii from New Zealand. Got caught in a terrific storm, and his sloop sank. He was able to send a radio signal of his position, but Weber said a sea and air search has failed, so far, to discover any trace of Huntington or his sloop."

"Gee, that's really too bad. Do you know why he wanted to see you and Dr. Weber?" Biff asked.

"I have an idea. And if what I think is true, then Jim Huntington's loss is a very real one for the whole world."

"I heard you mention there might be danger—" Biff stopped. A spark of excitement flashed across his face. His blue eyes lighted up.

"Danger, Biff? Well, we've been in tight spots before. You, in China, and with me in Brazil." Tom Brewster paused, then said slowly, "There's always an element of danger in the work we do for Ajax."

Biff, his face serious, nodded his head. He was

thinking of Hawaii, our fiftieth state. What danger could there be there?

The telephone operator at the Royal Poinciana Hotel on Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, looked up as her luncheon relief came into her small room.

"Hi. Am I ever glad to see you! I'm just about starved. I'm on a diet. Not for much longer, though. Hey, something funny's going on. That old gent in suite 210. Made a stateside call just now and didn't hang up when he finished. Imagine! He left the phone off the hook. I'll tell a bellboy to hop up there when I go out."

CHAPTER III

Worried Twins

ALTHOUGH he didn't want to show it, eleven-year-old Ted Brewster was just as excited as his sister over the call from Honolulu. He slipped quietly over to the door of the study. He wanted to know what the call was all about. He got there just in time to see Monica ushered firmly out as Biff closed the door behind her.

"Who was it, sis?" Ted demanded.

"Don't know." Monica shook her head. "It was just the operator saying she had a call from Honolulu for Mr. Thomas Brewster."

"You'd better go out and hang up the phone in the kitchen," Ted ordered.

Monica left the room and returned almost immediately.

"You didn't listen in?" Ted asked suspiciously.

"Course not! I have very excellent manners. No lady would listen in."

"Ha," Ted sneered. "*You,* a lady? A 'leven-year-old lady!"

"I'm older than you," Monica replied.

"Ten minutes older. Call that older? I don't. And don't tell me you never listen in. How 'bout yesterday? When I was talking to Peteso? I suppose you didn't try to listen in then."

"That's different. You're only a kid."

"A kid!" This was too much. "And what about you? You think you're so grown up."

The twins glared at one another. Then, without any reason, glares suddenly turned to smiles, followed by unexplained, uncontrolled laughter. Neither one of the twins could stay angry very long. When their giggles died away, they strained their ears toward the study door.

"Sure is a long call," Ted said. "Hope nothing's gone wrong."

"Gone wrong? What could go wrong, Ted?" Monica's voice showed her concern.

"I don't know. But I sure hope that call doesn't mean we're not going to Hawaii."

Now Monica was really worried. "Golly, I just couldn't bear it. Not to go!"

"Me, too. Biff gets to go everywhere. When do I get to go anywhere?"

"Or me?"

The two sat in silence, thinking how cruel the world was to eleven-year-olds. The Brewsters' summer cottage on Vineyard Lake—that was nothing. Their speed boat and water skis, they seemed like nothing, too. And their Christmas trip to Florida, visiting their grandparents—what were all those things compared to going to Hawaii? They had been to many places in continental United States, but neither of the twins had ever been out of the country. Well, even if Hawaii was now part of the U.S., they preferred to think they were going to an exotic new land.

That was why, when their father had told them just a week before he was going to take the whole family with him to Hawaii, the twins' joy knew no limits.

They had known their father was going to Hawaii for a three weeks' stay. He was to attend an international conference of mining engineers. He was even going to deliver one of the most important speeches at the meeting.

Biff Brewster was the oldest of the three Brewster

children. He had gone with his father on several of his explorations. But Biff was sixteen, an age Ted could hardly wait to reach. Biff even had his driver's license. To Ted, this was the highest goal anybody could hope to reach.

The Brewster family had been having a cookout in their backyard when Mr. Brewster made his wonderful announcement.

"One more week, and it's off to Hawaii," he said.

"Is Biff going?" Ted asked.

The children's father had smiled and turned to Mrs. Brewster. "Let's pack the small fry and take them along, too."

"What!" whooped Ted, his hot dog hitting the grass and his lemonade spilling all over his shorts as he leaped to his feet.

"And me? Me? I'm going, too!" Monica hurled herself at her father, her arms circling his neck.

"Easy there, princess. I'd rather have this food inside me, not on the outside."

Thomas Brewster put his daughter down. He looked into her eager, upturned face. Her hazel eyes sparkled. She had never looked prettier to him, and Mr. Brewster had always thought her the fairest princess of them all. Copper-colored hair framed her oval, pixie face. The summer sun had bronzed her clear skin. Keeping up with her brother Ted had given her a straight, sturdy figure. A nuisance at

times, when her spirits shot higher than Pike's Peak, she was the darling of the family, and had to be squelched only three or four times a week.

"What about it, Ted?" Mr. Brewster said teasingly. "Think your sister ought to come along, too?"

"Sure, Dad. Sure." was the quick reply. Monica flashed a loving look at her brother.

"All right, if you say so. Okay by you, Mother? And you, Biff?"

"You mean we're all going?" A look of disbelief crossed Mrs. Brewster's face.

"That's right. Time we all had a vacation together. I won't be too busy at this meeting. And I'm sure we'd all like to visit our fiftieth state."

Biff followed his father's words without speaking. He surely felt good, though, about what his father was saying. Biff knew how envious his brother and sister were of the trips he had made. This time, they were going along, too. The whole family! They'd have a swell time. Dad was really tops.

A smile softened Biff's strong-featured face. His blue-gray eyes lighted up. He moved off the deck chair where he was sprawled and walked over to drape an arm over his mother's shoulders. He was taller than his mother, with broad, square shoulders. For a sixteen-year-old, Biff was big and husky. He had to be, to have come out of his many adventures unharmed.

"Won't it be swell, Mom!" he said. "Dad couldn't have done anything to make Ted and Monnie happier."

Now, looking at his father's worried face, Biff wondered if the call from Dr. Weber might mean a change in plans. He hoped not. Not only for his own sake, but for his brother's and sister's. It would be a wonderful rest and vacation for Mother, too. Biff wished he knew more about his father's real reason for the trip.

"Dad, will that call make any difference about your taking us on the trip with you?"

"I don't know," his father said slowly. "Dr. Weber's call puts the whole trip in a new light."

"Gosh, Dad, Ted's and Monica's hearts would be broken."

Tom Brewster stood up. He went to the door without replying. When he opened it, his two younger children swarmed all over him.

"That call from Honolulu? What was it about?" Ted asked.

"Tell us, tell us!" chirped Monica.

Mrs. Brewster had entered the room. She looked at her husband questioningly.

The twins looked at their father. He ruffled Ted's hair and patted Monica on the cheek.

"We're still going, aren't we?" Monica said in a small, hopeful voice.

"I guess . . . Yes, we sure are."

Squeals of delight filled the air. But Mrs. Brewster, reading the expression on her husband's face, knew that the trip was no longer just a pleasure jaunt for him.

CHAPTER IV

Aloha!

THE blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, fourteen thousand feet below, sparkled under the slanting rays of the rising sun. Sleepy-eyed passengers aboard the Northwest airliner yawned, stretched, and brought their reclining seats to an upright position. Two stewardesses hurried back and forth along the aisle of the plane, carrying breakfast trays of chilled pineapple juice, slices of golden yellow papaya, and steaming coffee.

The younger members of the Brewster family, Biff and the twins, had been awake from the time of take-off, although their mother had insisted they try

to rest. Mr. and Mrs. Brewster still lay stretched out with their chairs in a reclining position, but now they showed signs of coming out of their fitful sleep.

"How much longer, Biff? How long till we get there? You've been to Honolulu before," Monica said.

"Only for a short stopover on my way to Burma," Biff replied. He looked at his watch. "I'd say we ought to be there in an hour. Maybe a little longer."

The Brewster family had boarded the plane at six o'clock that morning, their flight having been delayed on take-off for an hour by a low-hanging bank of fog. The big plane's four jet engines and a favorable tailwind had pushed it through the sky at a speed of over 600 miles per hour.

Thomas Brewster leaned over the seat in front of him where Ted and Monica were fussing in low tones over whose turn it was to sit next to the window.

"Morning, children."

"Morning, Dad."

"My, you're surely wide awake for such an early hour!" he said.

"Early? Gee, Dad, it's after ten o'clock," Ted replied, looking at his wrist watch.

Mr. Brewster laughed. "Guess Ted doesn't know about setting his watch back. You set yours right, Biff?"

Biff nodded his head.

"What do you mean, set my watch back?" Ted demanded.

"Difference in time, Ted. With daylight-saving time further complicating matters, it's three hours earlier in Hawaii than it is in Seattle. So, if your watch says ten, then it's only seven o'clock in Honolulu. People are just getting up there."

Ted, although still puzzled, turned his watch back three hours.

Biff came to the seat where Ted and Monica both had their noses pressed to the plane's window.

"Scrunch over, small fry. We'll be raising Diamond Head soon. Your big brother will point it out to you."

The plane zoomed through the air, racing the sun to Alohaland. The "Fasten Seat Belts" sign flashed on.

"Won't be long now," Biff said. "Ought to see Diamond Head any minute. Look . . . just over the right wing. See that sort of dark blur? That's Oahu, the island Honolulu is on."

Minutes later, Diamond Head rose majestically into view. The plane sped over the yawning crater of the extinct volcano, then bore to the left out over Honolulu Harbor. It turned back north, coming in low, and then settled gently down on Honolulu's International Airport.

The plane rolled to a stop, doors opened, and land-

Diamond Head rose majestically into view

ing ramps were wheeled into place. The twins, hardly able to contain their excitement, were first at the exit. Biff, his mother, and his father were right behind them.

Outside, a band played the familiar welcoming song, "Aloha." Native girls, in hula skirts, with fragrant flowers in their hair and brightly colored necklaces of more flowers around their necks, swayed to the rhythm of the music.

Monica danced down the landing ramp. At its foot, a hula dancer stepped forward and placed a lei, a beautiful necklace woven of flowers—around the excited girl's neck. Ted got the same treatment. More leis for Biff and Mr. and Mrs. Brewster, until the whole family wore fragrant chains of flowers up to their chins.

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Monica. "It's everything I ever dreamed of! Just like I've read about and seen in pictures."

It was a gay, exciting sight. The warm air, the gentle breeze, the music—a real Aloha, a real welcome. The spirit of Hawaii took over at once. Everywhere, happy people became happier. Gaiety filled the air. A soft scent of flowers cloaked the new arrivals.

The crowd milled about the gate leading to the terminal. It seemed there were hundreds of people all trying to pass through at once. The Brewster fam-

ily clung together, Monica clutching her mother's hand.

Thomas Brewster looked carefully over the crowd.

"I don't see Dr. Weber," he said to Biff. "I thought surely he'd meet us."

"Maybe he's just late, Dad."

Ted came up and touched Biff's sleeve. "Look, Biff, see that man over there?" He pointed.

Biff looked in the direction Ted indicated.

"See, Biff, he's taking pictures. He took several of you and Dad. I was watching him."

Biff's eyes met those of the man with the camera. He was a swarthy man, short, wearing a rumpled white suit.

"Gee, I guess Dad must be some sort of a celebrity, taking his picture and all," Ted said excitedly.

Biff didn't think that was the reason. The man didn't look like a newspaper photographer on an assignment. His eyes shifted as Biff stared at him. The man made no attempt to get "just one more shot," as official cameramen are apt to do. Biff started toward him, determined to find out why the man seemed to be so interested in photographing Mr. Brewster.

Seeing Biff approach, the man drew back, fading into the crowd. By the time Biff had forced his way to where the man had been standing, the picture-taker had disappeared.

Biff frowned. He hadn't liked the man's appearance, and his slinking away made Biff even more suspicious. Why had he taken the pictures? How had he known which of the arriving visitors was Mr. Brewster? Biff shook his head. The answer to that question might have some connection with the call his father had received from Dr. Weber.

He had better tell his father about the incident, Biff decided. He rejoined the family and was about to speak when Mr. Brewster raised his voice.

"Over here! Over here, Mr. Mahenili!" He waved to an approaching man who in turn waved back, calling, "Aloha, my friend. Aloha!"

It was Hanale Mahenili, a native Hawaiian with whom the Brewster family was to stay during their visit to the islands. Mr. Mahenili was the Hawaiian representative of the Ajax Mining Company.

Introductions were made, and with the smiling Hawaiian leading the way, the party entered the airport terminal.

Passing a newsstand, Mr. Brewster halted quickly. He strode to the newsstand and snatched up a copy of the *Honolulu Star Bulletin.* Biff stepped to his father's side and read the eight-column headline over his shoulder.

DR. WEBER, FAMOUS SCIENTIST, MISSING

CHAPTER V

Detective Biff

THOMAS BREWSTER read the startling story hurriedly. Biff read along with him. The story was sketchy. There were few details. Dr. Weber had been scheduled to open the first session of the mining engineers' conference the previous afternoon. The meeting had started, but Dr. Weber failed to appear. When the meeting ended, and Dr. Weber was still missing, the police were notified.

"Do you know anything about this, Hank?" Mr. Brewster asked Hanale Mahenili. "Hanale" was the Hawaiian form of the proper name, "Henry." Among his business associates, Mr. Mahenili liked to

be called Hank. His Hawaiian friends called him Hanale.

"Yes, my friend, I do," Mr. Mahenili replied. "It is most sad, most frightening. In fact, I was the one who discovered his disappearance."

"When and how?" Mr. Brewster's voice showed his concern.

"Yesterday afternoon, at the opening of the conference."

Tom Brewster turned to his wife. "Martha, why don't you take Ted and Monica over to that bench and sit down? We'll only be a minute. Biff, you stay with me. I want you to know what's going on. Sorry, Hank, but I didn't want my wife alarmed. Please continue."

Biff felt highly pleased that his father wanted him in on whatever was happening.

"Well, Tom, when Johann failed to appear at his place at the speakers' table, I thought at first he might have been detained, perhaps held up by traffic. Or that he might have been napping after lunch, and had overslept. He's an old man, you know. And not too strong."

"Yes. I know. We've all been worried about him. He still tries to do too much for a man his age."

"I waited about fifteen minutes," Hanale Mahenili continued. "Then I left the head table to go to his hotel. He's been staying at the Royal Poinciana. On

my way there, my fears that he had become ill increased."

Mr. Mahenili paused, as if ordering his thoughts.

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"At the hotel, I rang his room. There was no answer. I went to the desk, and they told me they believed the doctor was still in his room. He hadn't left his key at the desk, which was his habit every time he left the room."

"I'll bet you were really worried then," Biff said.

"I certainly was, young man. I called for the manager, and we went up to Johann's room. The manager had a pass key, and, after knocking, we entered his suite."

"And no Johann Weber," Mr. Brewster said.

"That's right, Tom. He has a two-room suite. He wasn't in either room."

"Was there any evidence that the room had been searched?"

Mr. Mahenili shook his head. "It was hard to tell. Papers on his desk were in a disordered mess. Two drawers in his bureau were pulled out, with clothing messed up, and a few things strewn on the floor. But you know how careless Johann was. He was never one for neatness and order."

"But it could have been someone else who had searched the desk, and pulled out the drawers," Mr. Brewster said.

"Yes, it could. There was no way of telling definitely."

"Sir," Biff said. "Were you able to get any idea of when he had last been in his room?"

"No, Biff. We weren't. I was coming to that. We questioned the elevator operators and the desk clerks. Both night and day clerks. None of them could remember when they had last seen the doctor."

Biff's brows were knitted in questioning thought. "Sir, I'd like to make a suggestion, or, rather, ask you this. Do you know if Dr. Weber usually had his breakfast in his room?"

"Why, the idea never occurred to us."

"Good thinking, son," Mr. Brewster said.

"And were the maids asked if his bed had been slept in the night before?"

Henry Mahenili gave a shrug of helplessness. "I'm afraid, young man, that you're a far better detective than I am. No, the maids weren't questioned."

"Well, then, Dad—"

Thomas Brewster interrupted his son. "I'm right with you, Biff. Our first stop in Honolulu had better be the Royal Poinciana Hotel."

"My car's right outside. Your luggage should be off the plane by now," Mr. Mahenili said. "The hotel's on the beach—Waikiki Beach. I'm sure your family will enjoy seeing the most famous beach in the United States."

"Gee, that's great," Biff said. "Ted and Monica will flip. And so will I. After all, we're tourists."

"All right, let's go."

Luggage and family were assembled and placed in Mr. Mahenili's open convertible. The Brewsters were in for a thrilling ride.

Leaving the airport, Mr. Mahenili turned onto a dual thoroughfare called Ala Moana. They crossed the Ala Wai Canal nearing the famous Waikiki Beach section.

"On the right," Mr. Mahenili pointed out, "is the Kapaiama Basin."

Yachts of every color and description lay at anchor in the beautiful harbor. Some were moving out into the main harbor of Honolulu.

Everywhere the Brewster family looked, they saw flowers. One street would be lined with trees bearing white flowers. The next street would be one of red flowering trees, or yellow, or deep blue.

The car turned off Ala Moana onto Kalia Road. They saw the gleaming dome of the Hawaiian Village. To their right now, they could see the beautiful hotels standing like sentinels guarding the beach. Then Mr. Mahenili turned the car into the spacious Garden-of-Eden-like grounds of the Royal Poinciana Hotel. Mrs. Brewster and the twins walked down to the beach. Biff, his father, and their Hawaiian friend went into the hotel.

The manager of the Royal Poinciana received the two men and Biff in his office. Biff looked at his father.

"Go ahead, Biff. This was your idea."

"Sir," Biff said, addressing the manager, "I wonder if you could find out if Dr. Weber usually had his breakfast in his room since he's been here?"

"Easily, young man. Won't take a minute." The manager picked up the telephone on his desk.

"And would you ask if he had breakfast there yesterday morning?"

The manager nodded his head and spoke into the phone. He asked both questions Biff had suggested, nodded his head, and replaced the phone on its cradle.

"No real help there. Sometimes he called for breakfast service; sometimes not. Yesterday morning, room service reports, there was no call from Suite 210-11—that's where Dr. Weber was staying."

"Well, one more thing." Biff continued his role of detective. "Would the same maids who were on duty yesterday be on duty this morning?"

"I'll check that with the floor supervisor. I think I know what your question will be—had Dr. Weber's bed been slept in?"

Biff smiled. "That's right, sir."

Again the manager placed his call and asked his questions.

"The floor supervisor will call back as soon as she's

checked. Only take a minute or two. While we wait, let me extend my welcome to Hawaii to you. I regret that this most unfortunate situation has come about. But I'm sure Dr. Weber will be found."

"Thank you," Thomas Brewster said. "I hope you are right."

The telephone rang.

"Yes. Yes. I see. Thank you." The manager replaced the phone. "The supervisor says the maid who takes care of that suite said Dr. Weber's bed had not been slept in Monday night."

Biff looked from his father to Mr. Mahenili. Nothing was said for a moment. Then Mr. Brewster spoke.

"Any more questions, Biff?"

"No, sir. Can't think of anything else, Dad. Not now."

"Well, we have established the fact that Dr. Weber must have disappeared sometime on Monday," Mr. Brewster said.

"That was the day he telephoned you, wasn't it, Dad?" Biff asked.

"Yes. I talked to him late in the afternoon. Here, that would have been around noon, Hawaii time. I know he was calling from this hotel. So, we can pinpoint his disappearance from sometime between noon Monday, to early Monday night. The doctor always retired early."

"Thank you very much for your cooperation, Mr.

Pierson," Mr. Mahenili said. With Biff and his father, he arose and left the manager's office.

They walked out into the bright sunlight and across a broad patio, hedged in by flame-colored flowers. The beach of Waikiki was right in front of them. As they walked toward it to find Mrs. Brewster and the twins, the swarthy man with the camera who had been at the airport earlier, stepped from behind a palm tree and watched them go.

CHAPTER VI

The Letter

HANALE MAHENILI had driven only a short distance from the Royal Poinciana when Monica, in the rear seat of the convertible, let out a howl.

"Monica! Whatever in the world!" her mother said.

"My lei! My lei! I left it on the beach!" Monica wailed.

"Knew you would," her brother Ted said, in his I-told-you-so voice.

Mr. Mahenili turned to Tom Brewster and smiled. "That's easily taken care of. We can get them anywhere along here."

He pulled the car over to the curb in front of a charming hotel constructed of red and white coral.

Just to the left of the entrance to the hotel's palm-studded grounds, sat an old woman surrounded by flowers of every color and species. The woman was seated in a high-backed chair, made of coconut fronds, with her feet in a tub filled with pink, red, and yellow buds. A flame-red hibiscus was stabbed in her topknot. She was a plump Hawaiian woman, dressed in a flowered *muumuu*, the island adaptation of the mother-hubbard dress introduced many years ago by New England missionaries.

The old woman's brown, deeply lined face cracked into a smile as the Brewsters got out of the car.

Mr. Mahenili spoke to her in the musical words of the native Hawaiian. The old woman's deft hands grasped a long, slender lei needle, and her hands seemed to fly as she swiftly threaded at least a hundred flowers into a beautiful garland.

"This lei," Mr. Mahenili explained, "is being made of the plumeria. You see," he picked up one of the flowers, "it has five petals. Smell it."

Mrs. Brewster took the flower. "My, that's lovely! It seems to me I've been smelling this lovely scent ever since we've been here."

"You have. This blossom is highly perfumed. It makes our island the sweetest smelling place in the world."

The old woman had finished. She arose and draped

the newly made lei around Monica's neck. "For the *nani keiki*," she said.

"That means for the 'beautiful child.' "

Monica blushed, but her smile showed her pleasure.

"Thank you," she said, dipping her head.

Mr. Mahenili handed the woman some money.

"*Mahalo, mahalo*," she said.

"And now she's saying, 'Thank you,' to us," Hank Mahenili explained.

Half an hour later, following a thrilling ride up the twisting road running over the *pali*, the cliffs, of the Koolau Mountain range, they dropped swiftly down to sea level again on the north side of the island. A short run along broad, curving beaches, and they arrived at the Mahenilis' beach-front home on Waimanalo Bay.

The warmth and gracious hospitality of the Mahenili family made the Brewsters feel at home immediately. The Mahenilis' son, Likake, fifteen, and Biff were old friends within an hour of their meeting. Little Wikolia Mahenili was just Monica and Ted's age, but quite a bit smaller. She considered the twins her personal property and showed them around with great pride.

There was only one cloud to mar the Brewsters' sky-high happiness. Dr. Johann Weber was still missing.

Late in the second afternoon of the Brewsters' stay in Honolulu, Biff and Likake were swimming when Biff saw his father come down to the beach and hail him.

"Let's go, Li!" Biff called, and the boys rode a breaker back to the shore.

"Hi, Dad. You want me?" Water dripped off Biff's tanned body. Likake, his round brown face with its usual eager expression, stood beside him.

"I want you to get dressed, now, son. I'd like you to come to the dinner and evening session of our meeting," Mr. Brewster said.

"You bet, Dad. Wouldn't miss it for anything. This is the night you speak, isn't it?"

"Yes." Tom Brewster smiled. "But that isn't the main reason for my wanting you there. I'll tell you about it later."

"Okay, Dad. May Likake come along?"

"Surely. Mr. and Mrs. Mahenili are coming. The little ones will stay at home."

Likake had gone on ahead.

"What's it all about, Dad? Something to do with Dr. Weber?" Biff asked.

"Not exactly, Biff. But I think there's going to be a man at the dinner tonight I want you to get a look at. There could be a connection between him and Dr. Weber's disappearance."

"Is it that man, Perez Something-or-other—the one you mentioned when you got that phone call at home?"

"He's the man, Biff."

Biff's brows were knitted in thought.

"Dad, there's something I've been wanting to do," Biff interrupted. "Is it all right if I do a little snooping after you speak? You'll be at the reception and dance. I've got an idea. And Likake said he'd help me."

"Snooping, son? When trained detectives are on the job? This is a vacation, and I want you to enjoy it. But there's no reason why you and Likake can't nose about a bit. Don't do anything foolish, though."

The dinner was over. Biff had tried not to stare too hard nor too long at the husky, shifty-eyed man at the next table. Perez Soto! Biff sensed the sheer physical power of the man, and he shuddered involuntarily. This was no opponent to treat lightly. He couldn't help thinking: Biff Brewster, take warning!

The chairman rapped for order. Guests at the head table were introduced, then the chairman turned to Thomas Brewster.

"We are very happy tonight," the chairman said, "to have so distinguished a speaker with us. You all know him. You all know of the many contributions he has made in our field. I refer, of course, to the

chief field engineer of the Ajax Mining Company, Mr. Thomas Brewster."

Mrs. Brewster smiled proudly at her husband.

Tom Brewster arose. His talk was short, direct, and crisply delivered. He received an ovation when he concluded.

Biff looked at Likake and winked. The two boys slipped away from the table unnoticed.

Outside the hotel, Biff asked, "Which way?"

"The Poinciana's just a short walk from here. We'll go in the back way—through the garden."

"You're sure it's all right? This bellboy is a good friend of yours?" Biff inquired.

"Sure. I know Hale real well. His brother, Kioni, and I go to Kamehameha School. That's a school only for boys and girls of Hawaiian ancestry. We're almost like blood brothers."

The night was moonlit. Palm leaves rustled under a gentle breeze. The steady murmur of the surf was clear in the night air.

Biff and Likake reached the garden of the Royal Poinciana.

"Hale told me he would fix it so the deck door of Dr. Weber's room would be open. Come on," Li said.

The boys walked boldly through the hotel's garden. Biff knew better than to try to hide their presence. To do so would attract attention, and that was just what he didn't want to do.

They mounted the stairs to the hotel's second floor, and walked along the deck until they reached Dr. Weber's room.

Hale had done his job. The door was open. Biff entered the room. Likake, his heart pounding, was right on his heels.

The room was faintly lighted by the moonlight from outside. Biff paused in the middle of the room to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the dim light.

Then he started his search. Ever since the call to Indianapolis, Biff had wondered about the letter mentioned during the conversation. His father had said, "Forget it," but Biff hadn't been able to. The letter *had* to mean something. Where would a man like Dr. Weber hide a letter? Biff asked himself. He felt certain that Dr. Weber had been kidnaped, but he didn't think the abductors had the letter. If they did, then why were they holding the doctor?

"Course, I could be all wrong," Biff told himself. But he didn't think he was.

"Likake. Li. Come here," Biff whispered and was startled to hear Li's voice right back of him.

"I am here. Right with you." Li sounded scared, Biff thought.

"Okay. You take the bathroom. It's a letter we're looking for. I'll take the bedroom, then we'll both search this room."

The boys made a swift, but thorough search. Nothing in the bathroom. Nothing in the bedroom.

"Now where do we look?" Li asked.

"You take that side of the room. I'll start by the hall door."

Biff's search started at the telephone table. Nothing in the drawers. But there wouldn't be, Biff told himself. Too obvious a place. He started to leave the table, and, glancing down, saw that the table must have been left in the same condition it had been in on the day of the call. Crumbs of tobacco were scattered on the tabletop. Several burned matches were in an ashtray. The doctor's tobacco pouch lay at the base of the lamp. Biff picked it up idly, looking about the room for the next spot to search.

Standing there, swinging the pouch by its drawstring, he thought he heard paper crackle. He stood motionless, halting the swing of the pouch. He strained his ears. Nothing. He tossed the pouch back on the table. Again he heard the slight sound of paper crinkling.

Biff snatched the pouch up again. He opened the pouch. His hand darted in it and dug deeply in the tobacco. Paper! His fingers weren't wrong. He withdrew the paper and held it close to his eyes. It was a letter, all right.

"Biff! Biff! Look out!" Li shouted.

Biff turned just in time to see a figure leap at him.

CHAPTER VII

An Important Find

BIFF sidestepped quickly. His attacker's charge struck him a glancing blow, spinning him around. He stumbled backward, almost losing his footing.

In the dim light, Biff saw the man turn and crouch, ready to charge again. This time, Biff met charge with charge. The man came at him low. Biff hurled his body at the attacker even lower. He threw a bone-crushing football block at the man's knees. The attacker was upended, his head striking the floor, his legs flying upward as if he were diving.

Biff leaped to his feet.

"Come on, Biff!" Li called from the open doorway.

Biff sprang for the door, hurdling over his attacker

lying on the floor. He felt sure he had cleared him when a hand snaked up and grabbed Biff by one ankle. Biff crashed to the floor, stretched out, his head pointing toward Li, who was standing in the doorway in dismay.

Rising on one knee, Biff tried to jerk his ankle free. The man held on with a viselike grip. Biff thought fast.

"Here, Li! Catch!" He tossed Dr. Weber's tobacco pouch to his friend. It fell at Li's feet. "Grab it, Li! Grab it, and scram. I'll be all right."

Li bent over and snatched up the tobacco pouch. He stood in the doorway, hesitating.

"Don't wait!" Biff called fiercely. "Get out of here fast."

Li, shocked by the sudden violence, was confused. He felt he should stay and help his friend. But Biff had ordered him out. Apparently the important thing was to escape with the tobacco pouch. He turned, shot through the door, and ran swiftly, silently, along the porch.

Biff now turned his full attention to freeing himself. He knew he would have to make his getaway fast. Someone in the hotel was certain to have heard the sounds of violence coming from the room. This was no time for an investigation. Biff knew that he was as much of a prowler as his attacker.

The attacker changed his tactics. Now he wanted to get free of Biff.

"Oh, no, you don't," Biff muttered, and threw his arms around the man's legs. He knew that Li was now the attacker's prey. Li and the tobacco pouch.

Biff held on. The man, struggling to remain upright, struck down savagely at the base of Biff's skull. Biff rolled, avoiding the paralyzing blow.

The attacker, freed of Biff's grasp, leaped for the door. Biff was on his feet, right behind him. Reaching the door, Biff saw the man dash for the steps. Instead of following immediately, Biff decided to wait a moment. Surely Li had gotten clear. Li knew the grounds of the hotel well. He'd be able to avoid capture, make a clean getaway with the pouch and its valuable letter.

When the attacker was out of sight, down the stairs, Biff stepped out onto the porch. He straightened his jacket. He wanted to look like a guest of the hotel if anyone stopped him. From behind he heard the sounds of someone banging on the corridor door.

"The time has come," he said to himself, "for me to make my departure from this charming hostelry." He walked unhurriedly toward the stairs. Once there, though, he dashed down them, taking three steps at a time. In moments, he was concealed behind a spreading poinciana shrub.

Biff stood silently. He strained his ears for any sound, the sound of either Li or his attacker. Only the soft rustling of palm fronds came to his ears. He decided to move out. Taking great care to remain in the cover of trees and shrubs—the moonlight was brilliant—Biff moved cautiously through the garden. He decided against returning the same way he and Li had come. He felt sure that his attacker had followed them from the hotel where his father had spoken. The man might figure the boys would return to the hotel. He'd be waiting for them there, Biff reasoned.

"Sure hope Li figures it the way I have," Biff told himself.

Biff walked in the opposite direction. He came to the edge of the garden. The street was only a few feet away. A few feet, but those few feet were open space, no cover, unprotected from the view of others.

"I'll just have to chance it," Biff said softly. He planned to dash across the opening, run down the street, and hope to find a cruising taxicab.

Biff tensed. He thought he heard a noise behind him. It sounded like a small twig snapping. He turned his head slowly. He didn't want a second attack from behind that night. Now he felt positive that someone was moving in the shrubbery nearby.

Then he heard it, softly, barely audible above the noise of the rustling leaves and nearby surf.

"Biff!"

Biff let out his held breath in a deep sigh of relief.

"Right here, Li," he called.

His Hawaiian friend emerged from behind a tree and joined him.

"You all right, Biff? You hurt?" Li asked anxiously.

"Me? No. Not even shaken up. But how about you? And the tobacco pouch. You've still got it?"

Li nodded his head, extending a hand with the pouch in it.

"Swell, Li. Great. How did you get away? Did that guy try to follow you?"

"He tried to follow all right. But I fooled him. I kept just far enough ahead of him so he could hear me. I made little noises." Biff could see Li's grin in the moonlight. "So I could lead him away. I wanted to be sure you got away okay."

"Pretty smart, Li. But how did you finally shake him off?"

"I led him way to the rear of the garden. Then I quit making any noise. I moved like a cat, circled around, and headed for here. I sort of figured you wouldn't try to get back to the other hotel."

"Good figuring. You and I are going to make a great team. But I think we'd better get out of here fast before 'Nosy' figures the same way we did. Where would be the best place to get a cab?"

"Just follow me." Li turned, and instead of heading for the street, he plunged back into the garden. He

led Biff along the edge of the garden, until they came to a low hedge fence, the rear boundary of the Poinciana's grounds. Li leaped over it, Biff following. Then the Hawaiian boy cut to his right, and in a few moments, they jumped another hedge into another formal garden.

"Where are we now?" Biff asked in a whisper.

"This is the garden of the Aloha Hale—that means Aloha House. It's a small hotel. We can find a taxi right out front. Come on."

They moved noiselessly through the garden, and emerged on the lighted street just to the left of the hotel's entrance. They were lucky. A taxicab was waiting at its stand. The boys quickly hopped in.

Biff sat back. Relief came to him, and he suddenly realized how much his recent exertions had taken out of him.

"Wowie! Am I ever glad to get out of that."

"Me, too, Biff. Where do we go? Back to the hotel, or home?"

"To your house. I told Dad we'd take a cab back." Li gave the driver instructions.

Biff looked at the luminous dial of his watch.

"Jeepers! Do you know it's been two hours since we left the hotel! Seems like only minutes."

Tom Brewster and Hank Mahenili were still up when the boys reached home.

"Well, we were beginning to wonder what had happened to you two," Tom Brewster said.

"Plenty, Dad," Biff said, smiling.

"It looks like it." His father was looking at Biff's rumpled white jacket. One shoulder of it bore a smudge where he had landed on the green carpet of Dr. Weber's room.

"We had a little adventure," Biff said. "More than we expected."

"You're all right, Li?" Hank Mahenili asked, a worried look on his face.

"Sure, Dad. It was Biff who had the fight."

"Fight?" Tom Brewster stood up. "Just what happened, son?"

Biff gave his father and Hank Mahenili a fast fill-in on the night's adventure.

"But we got what we were looking for," he concluded. Biff reached in his jacket pocket and pulled out Dr. Weber's tobacco pouch. He took out the crumpled letter.

"This has a New Zealand postmark on it. I think it's that letter you talked to Dr. Weber about when he called you back in Indianapolis. I haven't read it, though. Thought you might not want me to know what's in it."

Thomas Brewster took the letter. He read it rapidly, then reread it. His frown showed how deep his

concentration was. Without a word, he handed the letter to Mahenili. The Hawaiian read it.

The two boys watched their parents. Finally Biff spoke.

"Is it important, Dad? I thought it might be."

"Very important, Biff. Wouldn't you say so, Hank?"

"Unbelievably so."

Biff looked questioningly at his father.

"This *is* the letter Dr. Weber mentioned; the letter he received from Jim Huntington. It tells of a find Jim made in New Zealand—a fabulous mining discovery."

"And that's why he was coming here to meet you and Dr. Weber?" Biff asked.

"That's right, son."

"Then whoever it was attacked me tonight, or kidnaped Dr. Weber, would know where the find was, too?"

"Not exactly, Biff. They'd know of it, but not where it was. Huntington was bringing samples of the ore, and details of its location, with him."

"That information, then, must still be in his sunken sloop," Biff said.

Tom Brewster nodded his head.

"We'll have to find it, won't we, Dad?" the boy asked eagerly.

"We're surely going to try."

There was silence for several minutes. Everyone's mind was filled with thoughts.

"Dad." It was Biff who broke the silence. "Don't you think we can read good news in my finding this letter?"

"How do you mean, Biff?"

"Well, wouldn't you think from this that Dr. Weber must still be alive?"

"Why do you say that, Biff?" Hank Mahenili asked.

"Well, sir, whoever grabbed him, since they didn't find the letter, must figure Dr. Weber knows what Mr. Huntington discovered, and they're holding him until he tells them about it, or tells them where the letter is. They couldn't know that the location isn't described in the letter."

"But how would they know anything about it if they hadn't seen the letter?" Li piped up.

"They have their ways," Tom Brewster replied. "The doctor probably told someone else about Huntington's coming here. Not that he would have said why. But Huntington's explorations are well known. Whoever kidnapped Dr. Weber would know that a meeting between Dr. Weber, Huntington, and me could lead to something of tremendous value."

"And what is that, Dad? Can you tell me?"

"I could, Biff, but I don't think I will—not yet. The

fewer people who know what Huntington discovered, the better. And it would be safer for you, too, not to know."

"You mean, Dad . . ." Biff paused.

"Yes, Biff, you're in this now right up to your young neck. It could easily be figured that you now know as much as Dr. Weber, since you found the letter. That makes you a target, too."

Biff found it difficult to swallow the lump which had suddenly come into his throat.

CHAPTER VIII

The Police Call

"Did you get a good look at your attacker, Biff?" Tom Brewster asked his son.

"Gee, Dad. He came at me too fast. And it was fairly dark in the room."

"I was wondering. Perez Soto—you know, the man I pointed out to you at the dinner—well, he wasn't at the reception afterward. I thought he might have followed you boys."

"I don't think so, Dad. Perez Soto is a good-sized man. Husky. This fellow I had the hassle with was smaller, I think."

"And that Mr. Perez Soto," Li added, "he was wearing a white dinner jacket. This man wasn't."

"He could have changed, son," Hank Mahenili pointed out.

"Li's right, though," Biff said. "I think we both will agree that it wasn't Perez Soto."

"All right, boys. Better get to bed. It's late, and tomorrow's going to be a big day."

It was a big day, and it ended with a bang.

The engineering conference had wound up the night before with the dinner at which Biff's father spoke. This day, the day following, Hanale Mahenili had invited a selected group from among those who had attended the conference to a *luau* at his house. The prospect of going to the *luau*, the traditional Hawaiian feast, especially one cooked by a native of the island, was exciting.

Hank Mahenili had been up early to get things under way. He was going to supervise the cooking of the *luau* personally. It took all day to prepare a *luau* properly, and when Hank Mahenili did something, he did it right.

Biff and Li helped with the early preparations. They dug a deep pit in which a pig would be roasted.

"Anything else we can do, sir?" Biff asked.

"Not now, Biff," his Hawaiian friend replied.

"Then how about a swim, Li?" Biff inquired.

"Want to try real surfing this morning?" Li asked.

"Do I! Let's go."

Since Biff had arrived, the boys had swum before breakfast, after breakfast, and practically all their free time. Li was an expert swimmer, especially under water. At first, Biff became worried when his new friend dived and seemed to remain under water long past the safety point. But always, Li's laughing face would break the water just when Biff was about to dive for him.

Biff and Li hit the water and swam out into the ocean with powerful strokes. Biff was just a bit faster than Li. They took the plunge first to loosen up their muscles and became accustomed to the water. Next they tackled the surfboards.

Li swam most of the way back under water.

"You still worry me, Li. I don't know how you can hold your breath that long," Biff remarked as the boys walked up the beach.

"Just practice, Biff. I've been doing it since I could walk, I guess. Dad tells me I could swim before I could walk."

The boys paused to watch an outrigger come plunging toward the shore atop a long, rolling wave.

The outrigger was being paddled furiously by two Hawaiian boys. On one side of the canoe, its outrigging extended out in two arching arms, connected by a buoyant float of *wiliwili* wood to give the slender canoe more stability.

The canoe ground ashore, and its laughing passengers scrambled out.

"All set, Biff? Ready to make a real try at it today?"

"By me that's fine. I think I almost got the knack of it yesterday."

"When it comes to you, it comes all of a sudden. You just sort of feel it."

"I hope I feel it today," Biff said, laughing.

The first day, the boys had swum out to where the long rollers formed, and had ridden them in, their bodies held stiff. Li wanted Biff to become accustomed to the waves. Then they had started with the surfboards.

The two boys walked across the beach to two long, brightly painted surfboards made of *wiliwili* wood. They carried the boards out into the ocean until they were waist deep. Then, sprawling on the boards, they paddled off shore several hundred yards.

"Okay, we'll try it here. Head your board toward shore," Li called.

Biff slowly turned his board until its pointed bow was aimed at the beach.

"Okay. I'm ready."

"Let the first few waves pass until you get the feel and lift. Then, when one comes that feels good—that's the only way I can explain it—start paddling like crazy."

Biff followed instructions. He felt himself being lifted by the first wave, then a second. Now came a huge roller, raising both boys high above the trough left by the preceding roller. Biff started paddling furiously, still lying face down on the board. He felt the wave grab it. The board picked up speed, riding right at the crest of the roller. He had made it!

Li was right alongside. The boys were speeding shoreward at nearly thirty miles per hour.

When the roller broke on the shallow shore, Biff was tossed off in the foaming breaker. He grabbed his board and held on until the wave smoothed out.

"Gee! That's the most thrilling ride I've ever had!" he exclaimed.

"You did great, Biff," Li said. "But just wait. If you think that was a charge, wait till you ride the board standing up. How about it?"

"Let's go!" Biff agreed promptly.

Out they went again. Again they waited for the right feel of the roller. Biff felt one take his board. He was speeding shoreward. He looked over the water at his friend. He saw Li rise to a knee crouch, then slowly straighten up until he was standing straight, head held high.

Biff tried it. He got to his knees. Carefully feeling for his balance, he started straightening up. "I've done it," he said triumphantly to himself. He looked

shoreward just in time to catch a blinding splash of salt spray. He blinked his eyes, and the next thing he knew, he was floundering in the water.

Li, seeing what had happened, leaped off his board, turned it, and came paddling back to Biff.

"I meant to tell you. When you get up, hold your head high, and back. Then the salt spray doesn't hit you in the eyes."

"*Now* you tell me," Biff said, laughing. "I'm going to make it this time."

They started out even. Li got up first. Biff took seconds longer. He was more careful this time. The tough part was straightening up from a crouching position to an erect one, then placing one foot ahead of the other, and getting a good balance. Biff arose slowly, slowly but surely. He made it. The two boys rode standing up, only a few feet separating their two boards.

Li turned to Biff and grinned. Then he clasped his hands over his head, making a handshake of congratulation. He was so thrilled at seeing Biff make it that he forgot about himself. This time it was the expert who spilled himself into the water.

Biff rode triumphantly into shore alone.

The *luau* was ready. The guests had arrived. Li burst into Biff's room.

Biff got to his knees, carefully feeling for his balance

"*Wikiwiki*, Biff! Hurry. Everything's ready."

"I'm wikiwiki-ing just as fast as I can."

"Here, put on this *aloha* shirt—all the *kanes* wear them. The *wahines*, the women, wear *holukus* or *muumuus*. You call them mother-hubbards, only ours are brightly colored with big flowers printed on them."

"What do the kids—what do you call them—*keikis?* What do they wear?"

Li laughed at Biff's pronunciation. "How many times do I have to tell you that *every* letter in a Hawaiian word is pronounced? Here's how you say 'children' in Hawaiian: *kay-ee-keys*, with the accent on the first syllable."

"Okay, *Li-ka-kay*."

"Gee, that's the first time you've said my name right. You stick around long enough, and you'll be a real Hawaiian!"

"What's your name in English, Li?" Biff asked.

"Richard."

"Okay, Dick—let's go."

The *luau* was being held in the garden in the rear of the Mahenilis' home. Under gaily striped awnings, long tables had been set up. They were decorated with fragrant-smelling ferns, flowers, pineapples and bananas.

At each place setting, there had been placed a *niu*, a coconut with its top slashed off, still containing the

wai niu, or coconut water, which would be sipped with the meal.

Hank Mahenili stood over the *lua*—the hole Biff and Li had dug earlier in the day—making sure that the *puaa* was done to a turn. A *luau* isn't the real thing without a roast pig.

"All ready, everyone," Hank called out, and started cutting pieces of the pig. The meat was so tender it fell apart. Hank placed the meat on *ti* leaves, and servants carried it to the tables.

"What a meal!" Biff said, finding his place beside Li. "Never saw so much food."

In addition to the *puaa*, there was a *umeke*, a small bowl, of *poi*—taro root pounded to a paste. There was a dish, called *pa*, of *lomilomi*—salmon, which didn't look a bit like salmon, since it had been shredded and kneaded into a salad. There was also a dish of *moa*, chicken cooked in coconut juice, and another *pa* of *opihi*, a small, delicately flavored shell fish.

This wasn't all. There were *pas* of *i'a*, fish, and sweet potatoes, called *uwala kalua*.

"If I eat all this, I'll explode," Biff said.

"Here, have some of this," Li said.

"What is it?" There was a suspicious look on Biff's face.

"It's delicious. Called *limu*."

Biff took a small bite. His face lit up. "It's good. But what is it?"

"Seaweed," Li said and burst out into laughter.

"Honestly. *This* is seaweed?"

"That's right. Not the kind you know, though. This is an edible seaweed."

"I'll say it's edible. Give me more."

Everywhere one looked, Mahenili's guests were devouring the food. Strange though some of it looked, no one could deny the food's succulence. People were falling to as if they hadn't eaten for days.

Biff took one final bite and sat back.

"Couldn't eat another thing if I had to. Don't think I'll ever want to eat again." He looked at his friend and smiled. "*Mahalo, aikane.* Thanks, friend."

Biff's attention was attracted by a Hawaiian, not in *luau* dress, but in business clothes, coming across the garden. He saw the man approach Mr. Mahenili.

"Who's that?" Biff asked, nudging Li.

Li looked, and his face became serious.

"Golly. That's Mr. Kapatka. I wonder what he's doing here."

"And just who, *aikane,* is Mr. Kapatka?" Biff asked.

"He's the chief of the Honolulu police."

CHAPTER IX

Mysterious Message

"I'm sorry to interrupt your festivities," Chief of Police Kapatka said to Mr. Mahenili.

"That's all right, Kioni," Li's father replied courteously. "We're at the end of our *luau*, and I know you've got your job to do. Just what is it? You have word of the missing Dr. Weber?"

"Well, the answer to that has to be both yes and no. Actually, I'm here to see one of your guests. You have a Mr. Thomas Brewster staying with you, do you not?"

"Why, yes, we do."

"And his son?"

"Yes, Mr. Brewster and his family are staying with me on their visit to the islands."

"I'd like to speak to them," the chief requested.

Hank Mahenili excused himself and crossed the garden to where Mr. and Mrs. Brewster stood chatting with other guests.

Biff and Li had watched the police chief talking to Li's father. Now they saw Mr. Mahenili and Mr. Brewster coming toward them.

"Come along, Biff," his father said. "Police want to talk to us."

Li tagged along, the deep brown eyes in his bronze face wide with curiosity.

"I'm Thomas Brewster, Chief. And this is my son, Biff. Has Dr. Weber been found?"

"No, Mr. Brewster, unfortunately not."

"But it is Dr. Weber you want to see us about?"

"In a way, yes. Let me explain. An hour ago, we had a call from Wailuku, that's the capital of the Island of Maui. An emergency case had been brought to the hospital there—a man suffering from a deep stab wound. The man was identified as a certain Juan Tokawto. He has a police record. A minor criminal, in and out of several scrapes, but a bad character. A man for hire."

"Yes. But what has that to do with me, or my son?" Mr. Brewster asked.

"I'm coming to that, sir. Tokawto was found un-

conscious. At the time the police called from Wailuku, he was still unconscious, so they hadn't been able to question him. They did find in his wallet, though, a picture, a small photograph—two photographs, in fact. They identified the man in one of the photos from a picture that appeared on the front page of our Honolulu paper yesterday."

Chief Kioni Kapatka paused. He apparently enjoyed building up suspense.

"The photograph in our paper was one of you, Mr. Brewster. It appeared the day you spoke at the mining engineers' meeting."

"I know. But I don't see—"

"The small photo found in Tokawto's pocket was also of you, Mr. Brewster. Of you and a lad whom I presume to be your son. This boy, here." He looked at Biff.

"Remember, Dad? I told you about that man at the airport snapping pictures of you, of you and me. Ted spotted him first," Biff reminded his father.

Thomas Brewster nodded his head. "Well, Chief Kapatka, I can't imagine why any criminal would be carrying a picture of me and my son."

"But remember, Mr. Brewster, I said that man was carrying two pictures."

"Yes."

"The other picture was that of the missing Dr. Weber."

The police chief's last statement struck the group like a bombshell. For moments, nothing was said. The chief broke the silence.

"I'm sure that now you will see the connection," he said.

"Yes," Thomas Brewster replied. "There must be one. But just what? Have you any ideas?"

"Only this, Mr. Brewster. The man Tokawto must have been hired to keep a close check on your and your son's movements. I suspect he was in Honolulu yesterday. He must have learned something—something of value to someone."

"Say, Dad, I wonder if that man could have been the one who—who—" Biff paused. He didn't want to reveal to the police chief that he had gone into Dr. Weber's rooms at the Royal Poinciana without authority. "You know, Dad. The man I had that little scrape with."

"Could have been, son."

The police chief looked at Biff with renewed interest. However, he didn't press Biff for a fuller explanation.

"It is my belief, Mr. Brewster," Chief Kapatka continued, "that when Tokawto went back to Maui, he thought his information was worth more than he was being paid. His attempts at getting more money were rewarded by a stab in the abdomen."

"Some reward!" Biff interjected.

"But why the Island of Maui?" his father asked.

The police chief shrugged his shoulders.

Biff touched his father's arm. "I have an idea on that, Dad," he said.

"Let's hear it, son."

"Wouldn't you think that perhaps Dr. Weber might be on the island, or on a nearby one? And that whoever kidnaped him must have his headquarters there?"

The three men considered Biff's idea.

"You could be right, Biff. Do you agree, Chief?"

Chief Kapatka nodded his head in agreement.

"The police on Maui have asked that you come to Wailuku. They want you there when Tokawto has recovered sufficiently for questioning," the chief said. "*If* he recovers," he added.

"We'll go right away. Can you come along, Hank?"

"Certainly. Let me explain to my guests."

Biff felt a tug on his sleeve. It was Li.

"How about asking if I can go, too, Biff?"

"Sure. You can help us." Biff turned to his father. "Dad, Li ought to go along, too. He speaks Hawaiian, and he and I might pick up some valuable information. Would you ask Mr. Mahenili?"

Thomas Brewster nodded his head. "You better go pack a small bag. We may be there for a day or two. Hop to it. We want to get over there quickly."

Biff and Li went into the house.

"We'll get there soon, Biff. We'll take the Inter-Island Street-Car System."

"Street-car! What are you talking about? Street-cars running across the ocean!"

Li chuckled. "That's what we call the Hawaiian Airlines. They make so many flights each day, it's just like standing on a corner waiting for the next street-car."

And it was. When the boys and their fathers reached the airport, they learned there was a plane taking off within fifteen minutes.

The flight to Kahului, the principal airport on Maui, took only thirty minutes. They arrived just as dusk was spreading over the Valley Island, as Maui is called.

The drive from the airport to the capital of Maui, Wailuku, was a short one. The police were expecting them.

"We've just been talking to the police in Hana," the Wailuku police chief said. "Tokawto is still on the danger list. They haven't been able to get anything out of him."

"Then this Tokawto isn't here?" Tom Brewster asked.

"No. He's in Hana, a coastal town about sixty miles from here."

"Shouldn't we start right down there?"

"You can, of course, Mr. Brewster. However, Tokawto's been placed under heavy sedation. There's little chance that he'll do any talking tonight. I'd suggest you spend the night here, then drive down early tomorrow morning."

"Oh, yes, Tom," Hank Mahenili said. "You don't want to miss the drive to Hana. It's a truly beautiful and thrilling experience."

The sixty-mile drive was one of continuous curves. The road snaked around cliffs, dived down to sea level, then climbed back up another cliff.

The party checked into the Han-Maui Hotel, then left for the police station.

Tokawto had come out of his sedation, but was still in such serious condition that his words seemed a meaningless jumble during his conscious spells.

"I don't know if he's going to make it or not," Mr. Brewster said in a low voice.

Biff stepped to the wounded man's bedside for a closer look.

"That *is* the man who was snapping pictures of us at the airport, Dad," he declared.

"Do you also think he's the one you had your tussle with?"

"He could be," Biff said slowly. "I'd say he's about the right size. I didn't get a close look at his face, though."

Tokawto moaned. He opened his eyes. He looked at Biff, and a frown of recognition crossed his face. He stretched out one hand and spoke.

"Ka Lae," he said, and repeated the two Hawaiian words: "Ka Lae."

"What does that mean, Hank?" Mr. Brewster asked.

"Ka Lae is the name of the southern tip of the Big Island—Hawaii."

"I think he was trying to tell me that," Biff said. "I'm sure he recognized me, and is trying to tell us that we ought to go to Ka Lae."

Biff's father nodded his head. "I think you're right, Biff. Those words have a meaning for me, too. I'll tell you about it later. Back at the hotel."

They walked the short distance back to their quarters.

"Hank, do you think we could charter a boat here for a couple of days?"

"I'm sure we can. You're going to Hawaii?"

"Yes. To Ka Lae. But, I want it thought that we're just off on a fishing cruise. No need for anyone but us to know our real reason for going."

"Do you think Dr. Weber might be being held on the Big Island?" Biff asked.

"I think it quite likely, Biff. But there's still another reason for us to take a good look around Ka Lae. That I'll tell you about when we're on our boat at sea. Would you mind hopping up to my room and

getting my sun glasses, Biff? Then we'll go see about a boat."

Biff took the stairs to the second floor three at a stride. Li was right behind him. Biff scrambled through his father's bag, looking for the glasses.

"Hey, Biff. Look at this!" Biff, glasses in hand, turned to see Li pointing to the mirror of the room's dresser. He walked over for a closer look.

On the mirror, written in soap, was a message:

"JW for Cs"

CHAPTER X

Starting a Search

BIFF wasted no time in getting back down to the lobby of the hotel. He told his father about the message written in soap.

"Just the letters, you say—*JW* for *CS?*" Mr. Brewster exclaimed. "Let's go back to my room. I want to see them for myself."

The Brewsters and the Mahenilis went up the stairs. As they neared Mr. Brewster's room, they noticed its door was open.

"Now what can that mean? More trouble? That door was closed." The question flashed through Biff's mind, but he did not speak.

The door, it developed, had been left ajar by the

maid, but it was what she was doing that upset Thomas Brewster.

They entered the room just in time to see the maid wipe the soap message off the mirror.

Thomas Brewster started to speak, but he realized that she was only doing her job. When the maid left the room, Mr. Brewster questioned his son closely.

"Now this is important, Biff," he said. "Can you remember exactly how those letters were written? I mean, were they all capitals? Or was one or more of them in lower case?"

"Lower case?" Li looked puzzled.

"He means small letters, Li. Now let's see, Dad. I'm almost positive that the *J* and the *W* were capitals. How about you, Li? Is that how you remember it?"

The Hawaiian lad nodded his head.

"And I think I'm sure about the *C*. It was a capital letter, too. Right, Li?"

"Gee, I think so, Biff."

"But what about the *s*, Biff? This is important," his father said.

Biff frowned. He closed his eyes trying to recreate a mental picture of the soap scrawl. "Dad, I can't be absolutely sure, but I think the *s* was a small letter."

Biff looked at Li. Li could only shrug his shoulders.

"I think your memory is probably right, Biff. You have a pretty good one, and besides, it fits," Mr. Brewster declared.

"I'm completely mystified," Hank Mahenili put in. "All this talk about letters, capitals, and small letters. What do they mean, Tom?"

"Well, first, I think—I hope—they mean that Dr. Weber is definitely alive. That's good news. They must also mean that he's being held prisoner. Not so good. The doctor is old, you know, and just how much he can stand at his age is doubtful."

"If he's alive, we'll find him," Biff cut in.

"But the letters, what do they mean?" Hank repeated his question.

"The *J* and the *W*, I'm sure, stand for Johann Weber. The *C*—capital *C*—and the small *s*, is the chemical symbol for cesium."

"Cesium!" Understanding came to Hank Mahenili. Any informed engineer knew the importance of this element.

"Just what is cesium, Dad? And what is it used for?"

"Technically, son, its atomic number is 55, and its atomic weight is 132.91. Its use?" Mr. Brewster smiled. "I'll tell you this, we'll never get to the moon without it."

"You mean it's used in rocket propulsion?" Biff asked.

"That's right, Biff. It's a high-thrust, long-life rocket propulsion fuel. Most costly."

"More than gold?" Li asked eagerly.

"Much more, Li. If you and Biff had about ten pounds of it between you, you'd have your education paid at any college you wanted to go to—M.I.T., Cal Tech—any of them."

"Wow! Must be worth more than a thousand dollars a pound, then," Biff said, his voice filled with amazement.

"It is, Biff. The refining process is what makes it so expensive. Scientists and explorers—like Jim Huntington—have carried on extensive searches to locate a field where the purity of the ore is high—higher than in those fields we now know about."

"And Mr. Huntington—he thought he had made such a strike?" Biff asked.

Before answering, Tom Brewster went to the door. He opened it cautiously and looked up and down the hall.

"I don't want any eavesdroppers or spies lurking around." He had lowered his voice until it was little more than a whisper.

"Now I'll fill you in so you will all know what we're up against." Hank Mahenili, Li, and Biff crowded close to Mr. Brewster. They didn't want to miss a word.

"That letter you found the other night, boys, is important. Not as important as Dr. Weber's abductors

think it is, but it does tell of a cesium find Huntington made in New Zealand. He felt it to be a sensational discovery."

"High-grade ore?" Biff asked.

"Yes. In his letter to Dr. Weber, Huntington told of the find, of his belief in its high degree of purity. He was bringing a sample, and a map of the location, to Honolulu. Dr. Weber was to assay it. Then, if it proved out as expected, Ajax Mining was to move in on the deal and exploit the field."

"And Mr. Huntington never got here," Biff said.

"That's right. That call I received from Dr. Weber —you remember, Biff. The doctor had just arrived in Honolulu when word of Huntington's loss at sea became known. There was an extensive sea and air search, but nothing was found, no sign of the sloop's wreckage, and, even more unfortunately, no slightest sign of Huntington."

"How could that be, Mr. Brewster?" Li wanted to know.

"It is thought that Jim Huntington's sloop must have split its seams open in a heavy squall, Li. Huntington apparently stuck by his boat and went down with it."

"Isn't it supposed to have gone down somewhere off Ka Lae, Dad?"

"That's right. But there's a lot of ocean off the southern tip of the Island of Hawaii."

Biff was frowning with concentration. "Ka Lae," he said. "Those are the two words Tokawto mumbled to us this morning."

"And that's where we're going," his father said.

"You think Dr. Weber is being held somewhere near there, while somebody tries to locate the sunken sloop?"

"I'm sure of it now, Biff."

"Who do you think his abductors might be, Dad?"

Thomas Brewster looked at Hank Mahenili. "Any doubt in your mind, Hank?"

"Not one bit," the Hawaiian answered, shaking his head. "Perez Soto."

"He'll make contact with us again," Biff's father said. "He doesn't know exactly what is in this letter Biff found. His message—the one written on that mirror, is telling me that if we want to see Dr. Weber alive again, then I'll have to tell him where the cesium strike is located."

"And that information is at the bottom of the sea," Biff said soberly.

"Yes," Mr. Brewster said. "We've got to do everything we can to try and spot that sunken sloop. Dr. Weber's life depends on it."

CHAPTER XI

Wharf Rats

BIFF's father had concluded his conversation.

"Now you all know as much as I do. Now we move into action. Biff, you and Li will be our ground forces. Li's father and I will take over the naval side."

"You mean we're not going to the Big Island with you?" Biff was dismayed.

"No, Biff. I want you and Li to roam about Hana. You both had a good look at Perez Soto. I'm sure you could describe him. Make a few inquiries. See if anyone of his description has been in Hana recently. Hana is a very big place. I'm sure he was here yesterday—probably met with Tokawto, to Tokawto's misfortune."

"We'll check on him, too. We'll stop by the police station," Biff replied.

"Hank," Mr. Brewster went on, "our job is to rent a boat. A yawl, about thirty feet. Biff and I can sail, and I'm sure you and Li have handled boats all your lives. I don't want a captain or a crew. Just a boat. Think we can rent one here?"

"I'm positive we can, Tom."

"All right then. Boys, you start your investigation. You're pretty good at it. But be careful. Meet us back here in time for lunch. I hope we can sail tonight."

Biff and Li went to their room and changed into shorts. Then they went out to explore Hana.

The mid-morning sun was bright. The sky was clear. It was a beautiful day on the Island of Maui. The boys covered the small business section, stopping in a few stores, and asking if anyone had seen a man answering to the description of Perez Soto. They were becoming discouraged as noon approached.

"Let's go to the police station, Li. See how Tokawto's condition is," Biff suggested.

They learned that the wounded man was still much the same. It would be a close thing if he lived.

Leaving the police station, Biff had an idea. "Look, Li," he said, frowning. "We're going about this thing all wrong. If Perez Soto kidnaped Dr. Weber and took him to Hawaii, he'd have to have a boat, wouldn't he?"

"Sure, Biff, sure."

"Then let's head for the docks and find out if anyone looking like Perez Soto has rented a boat in the last week or so."

"Good idea, Biff."

They headed for the waterfront. Suddenly Biff turned to his friend.

"Don't look back, Li," he muttered, "but I think we're being followed. Just walk along as we're doing now. When we get to the middle of the next block, you leave me. We'll shake hands, then you cross the street. Go into one of the stores. Find a place where you can see out but can't be seen from the street. Keep a sharp lookout."

Li's face showed his excitement. "I get you, Biff. You want me to see if someone keeps on following you."

"That's right. I'm going to continue on down the street another few blocks. Then I'll cut back and meet you in front of one of those stores. Look sharp, now."

The boys solemnly shook hands. Biff clapped Li on the shoulder. "Be seeing you," he called loudly when Li had reached the middle of the street. Then Biff continued his "sight-seeing" walk along Hana's main street.

He desperately wanted to look behind him, but he knew that to do so would spoil his plan. He walked three blocks, stopping every so often to stare into a

window. If he was being followed, he wanted to give Li plenty of time to spot his pursuer.

Toward the end of the street, where the business section left off and the residential section began, Biff cut across the street, then started slowly back to his rendezvous with Li on the opposite side.

He saw Li in front of a small store, standing under a brightly colored awning.

"Well, did you see anything?" Biff asked.

"I think so, Biff. But I don't know for sure. There was a man, maybe one hundred feet behind you. Every time you stopped, he'd stop, too, and sort of step into a doorway, in case you looked back, I guess."

"Then I was being followed!"

"Gee, Biff. I thought so at first. But then this man turned into a side street before you reached the end of your walk."

"How could you tell that, from inside that store?"

"Oh? Well, I stepped out on the sidewalk, so I could see better. Once you got down to the next block, I couldn't see you through the window any more."

Biff smiled. "I was being followed, all right, Li."

"But how can you be sure? This man didn't keep on following you."

"You know why, Li? Because when you stepped out on the sidewalk, the man spotted you. He had

seen you with me, and knew you had planted yourself in the store just to check and see if he was following me."

Li's face fell. "Gee, I'm some detective! Charlie Chan would box my ears, as he was always doing with No. 1. Son. I'm sorry, Biff."

"Don't let it get you down. Let's go find out about boats."

If Li had flunked his first detective test, he more than redeemed himself on his second.

At the waterfront, the boys spotted several signs announcing boats for hire.

"Let me see if I can find a *kamaaina*," Li suggested. "I could talk to him. He might even know my family, then I could find out a lot."

"Go ahead, Li. Good idea. I'll take a walk out on that dock and wait for you."

Biff stood on the end of the pier, scaling small sea shells into the water. He could see Li going from place to place. At a nearby dock, Li took much longer than at the other places where he had inquired. Biff could see him talking to an old Hawaiian, bent of body, wearing a floppy sun hat. He saw Li look in his direction and signal for him to come over.

Proud excitement shone from Li's face as Biff came up.

"I've got big news, Biff," Li exclaimed. "This *kamaaina* has told me just what we want to know.

He's an old man, speaks no English, but he says he knew my father's family many years ago."

"Yes, but what about Perez Soto?"

"I'm coming to that. The oldtimer says he didn't rent any boat last week, but at that dock up there—" Li pointed to a dock about one hundred feet down the shore—"a *malihini*—that means a newcomer—rented a big power boat about five days ago. He can't remember the exact day. He's old, I guess, and kind of forgetful. But he thinks it was on a Monday. That would be—"

Last Monday! That was the day Dr. Weber had disappeared!

"Good going, Li," Biff exclaimed. "And you described Perez Soto?"

"I sure did. And the *kamaaina* says he thinks it was the same man. The man came to him, first, but he didn't have any boat big enough to suit this man."

"Well, Li, I think we're getting somewhere. I want to try one more thing before we go back. I want to make sure I was being followed. I think it's important to know if any of Perez Soto's men are still in Hana."

"Why would they be," Li demanded, "if Perez Soto and the doctor are on the Big Island?"

"Don't forget about Tokawto. I'm sure Perez Soto would want to know if Tokawto recovers enough to talk."

"What are you going to do?"

"I've got a trick up my sleeve. If someone is following me, it might be because he thinks I might still have that letter." Biff took out his address book and tore paper from the back of it. "You know he might be just stupid enough to think I was still carrying the letter with me."

"Guess he'd have to be plenty *lolo* for that, Biff."

"Plenty *lolo?* What does that mean?"

"It means dumb or stupid," Li replied.

Biff grinned. He took a pencil and scribbled a word on the paper. Then he stuck the paper in his hip pocket, on top of his handkerchief.

"We'll walk over to that boathouse," Biff said. Halfway there, he stopped, pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. As he did so, the paper fell to the ground.

"Come on," he muttered. The boys entered the boathouse. They pretended to examine the boats, allowing themselves several minutes.

"Guess we've given our pursuer long enough, if we are being followed," Biff decided.

They came back out of the boathouse and retraced their steps. At the spot where Biff had pulled out his handkerchief, he stopped again, and looked carefully about him.

"We've been followed, all right. The paper is gone," Biff said to Li.

"What did you write on that paper, Biff?"

"'*Lolo*,'" Biff said, and the boys burst out laughing.

Time had slipped by much faster than Biff and Li realized. It was midafternoon when they got back to the hotel.

"Guess I've been so excited I forgot about eating," Li said, "but am I ever hungry now!"

"I could eat my way through another *luau*, Li," Biff agreed.

At the front desk of the hotel, they found a message from their fathers.

"*We're checking out the boat*," Biff's father had written, "*and getting supplies. Wait for us.*"

Biff and Li had a late lunch, took a small siesta, then had a refreshing swim in the hotel's pool. It was growing dark when Mr. Brewster and Hank Mahenili came back.

"We've got the boat, Biff. And it's a real honey. As trim a craft as you'd ever want to see."

"Where is it, Dad?" Biff wanted to see the boat.

"Tied up at the municipal wharf. Know where that is?"

"We sure do. We were down there this afternoon. I wonder how we missed you."

Biff then told his father and Mr. Mahenili what he and Li had learned.

"I felt sure it would be Perez Soto. And he rented a powerful cabin cruiser?" Mr. Brewster asked.

"That's right, Dad. Li's *kamaaina* friend thinks it was the Monday Dr. Weber disappeared."

"It all adds up. We can't get to Hawaii fast enough now."

"Are we leaving tonight?" Biff asked.

"About ten o'clock. Have to wait until then for supplies to be delivered."

"Gee, is it all right if Li and I dash down to the dock and look at the boat?"

"Sure. You'll have time. But don't stay too long. We'll be having dinner in an hour."

Biff and Li started for the door.

"Hey!" Mr. Brewster called. "Don't you think you ought to know the boat's name? It's the *Easy Action.*"

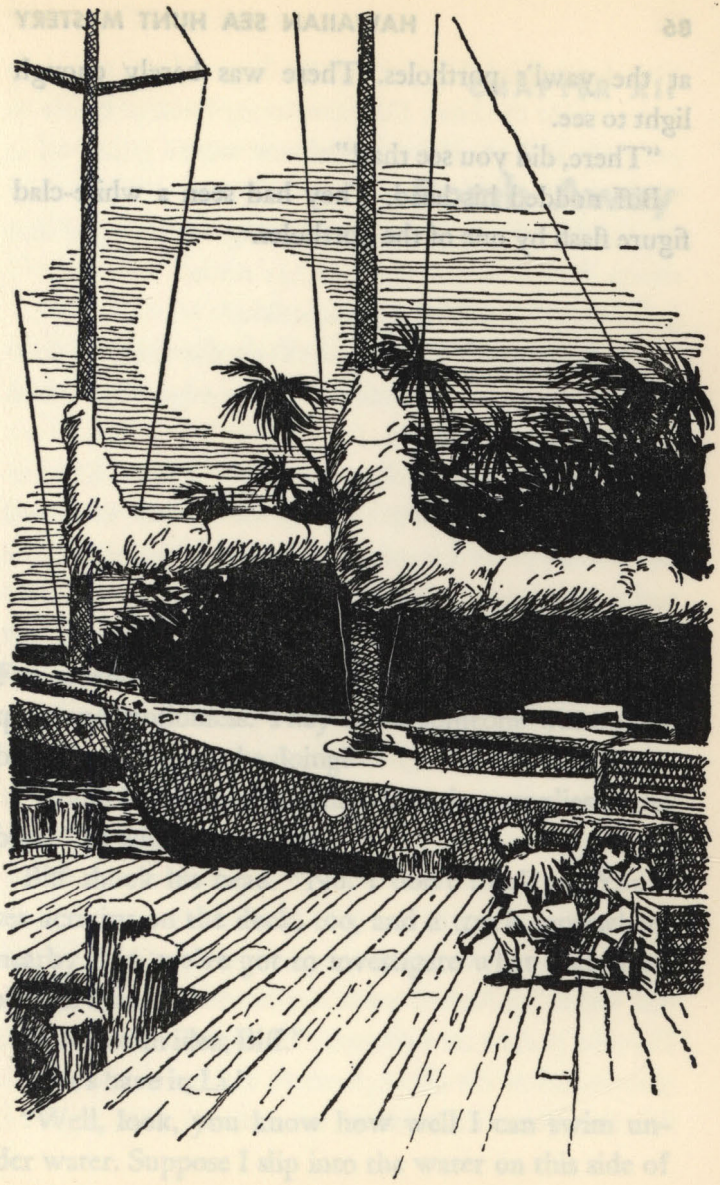
It was growing dark when Biff and Li reached the dock. There was the trim craft, painted a bright white, with a golden arrow trimming its sides. Its two masts swayed gently from side to side in the gently rolling water.

"She's a beauty, all right," Biff said to Li as they approached the boat. "Come on, let's go aboard."

Biff felt Li's hand on his arm, restraining him.

"Hold it, Biff," Li said in a whisper. "I think I saw someone on the boat. Let's duck behind these pineapple crates."

The boys secreted themselves. They peered intently

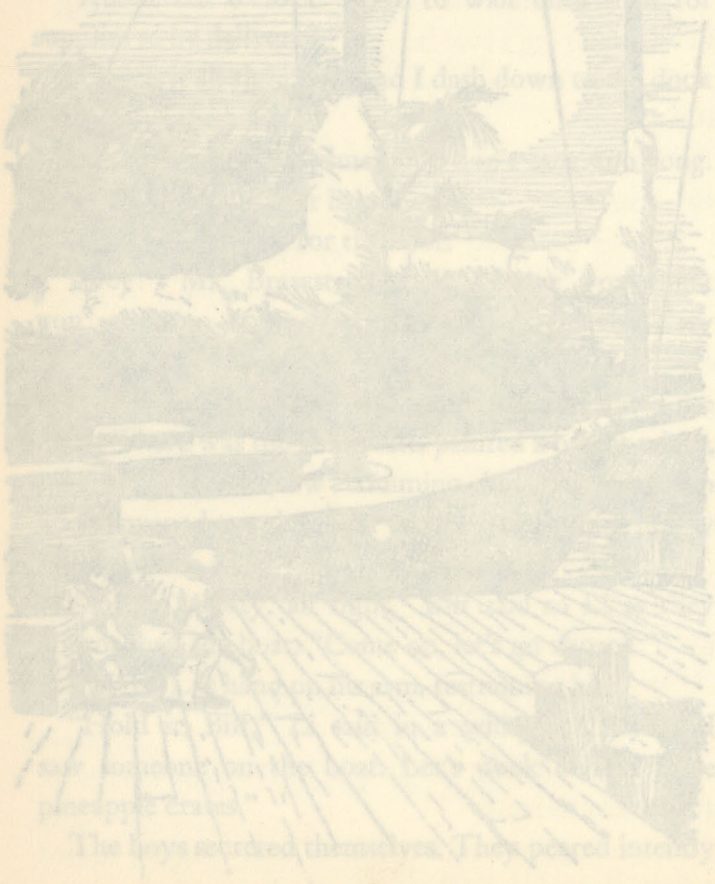


They peered intently at the yawl's portholes

at the yawl's portholes. There was barely enough light to see.

"There, did you see that!"

Biff nodded his head. They had seen a white-clad figure flash by one of the portholes.



CHAPTER XII

Bomb Away

For several moments Biff and Li remained absolutely quiet and motionless. They knew someone was on the boat. But what was he doing?

"Could he be one of the men bringing supplies to the boat?" Li whispered at last.

Biff shook his head. "No. I don't think so. You'd see activity on the deck, too, and a truck somewhere nearby. No, we've got to investigate what that character is doing."

"I've got an idea, Biff."

"Let's have it, Li."

"Well, look, you know how well I can swim under water. Suppose I slip into the water on this side of

the wharf. Then I'll swim under it, and I can come up right beside the boat. I'll move along from porthole to porthole and see if I can find out what's going on in the boat."

"Sounds okay to me. Good thing we changed into shorts. Be careful not to make any noise."

"Me, Biff? I'll be as quiet as a fish."

He was, too. There wasn't even the faintest "ker-plop" as Li lowered himself over the edge of the dock and sank into the water.

Biff waited tensely. From behind his stack of pineapple crates, he could get a good view of the starboard side of the yawl. He could see right to the water line and the four portholes just above it.

Moments became minutes, and it seemed to Biff that the minutes were stretching out much too long. Had Li met some obstruction beneath the dock? Biff's worry was increasing. Finally, he noticed a circle of lightly rippling water near the bow of the boat. In the center of the circle, he could just spot Li's head.

He watched as his friend slowly raised himself by the boat's starboard gunnel until his head was even with the porthole. Noiselessly, Li dropped back into the water and took two strokes toward the stern. Now he peered into the second porthole. He repeated the process at the third porthole and moved on to the fourth. The fourth must be the one, Biff figured,

that was in the small compartment where the yawl's auxiliary engine was located.

Li took a longer time at this porthole. Biff watched him intently through the growing darkness. A slight movement on the boat caused him to raise his eyes. He gasped.

Directly over Li stood a man with a small nail keg raised over his head. He was ready to smash it down on Li's head.

"Li! Look out! Duck!"

The Hawaiian boy submerged just as the keg struck the water at the exact spot where his head had been.

"Jeepers," Biff thought, "I hope Li got far enough under."

The keg hurler was running along the deck toward the boat's bow. Here he could leap on the dock and make his getaway.

Biff went into action. He jumped from behind the crates, reached the boat in six fast strides, and leaped aboard just as the prowler reached the bow.

Biff grabbed at the man. His arms encircled him, and Biff in turn felt the man's arms squeeze him in a bearlike hug. Biff exerted every ounce of his strength, trying to force the man over backward, trying to free himself of the man's crushing grip.

He heard a noise from directly behind the man. Looking over his shoulder, Biff saw the dripping fig-

ure of Li scramble aboard. Li didn't hesitate. He threw himself at the man, striking him just at the knees from the rear. "Clipping," flashed through Biff's mind. Unfair in football, but in a fight like this there'd be no fifteen-yard penalty.

The impact of Li's body forced the man to release his grip. As he did, Biff stepped backward. His feet became entangled in a coil of rope. He lost his balance, toppling backward. His feet hit the raised gunnel, and the next moment he was flying through the air. He felt himself falling, a sickening feeling, as if he were falling from a great height. He wasn't, though. He was falling from the bow, six feet to the water. But he was falling backward and had no time sense of the distance.

He hit the water with a splash. His broad back smacked the water with the noise of a loud handclap. Biff could feel his back sting from the impact.

He turned over and looked up. There was the bow of the boat, directly overhead. There was Li, looking down at him.

"You all right, Biff?" There was a strange sound in Li's voice. For a moment, Biff was angered. The strange sound was Li trying to hold back his laughter. Biff's sense of humor came to his rescue. He must have been a funny sight, thrashing around in the water on his back like a beached porpoise.

"Yep. I'm all right," he called. "I'll swim to midships. You can give me a hand up."

Once back aboard, Biff's first concern was about the prowler.

"Oh, him," Li said. "When you made your backward bellywhopper, that guy took off. He raced down the dock. He's long gone by now."

Biff rubbed the small of his back with his left hand. "That hurt. And here you are laughing at me."

"You were funny, Biff," Li laughed. "And that sting won't last long."

"Guess you're right. Hey, let's see if we can find out what our visitor was doing on board."

First the boys explored the deck of the boat. They opened the sail-chest and inspected the sails. They hadn't been touched. They carefully examined the yawl's rigging. Both knew that an important rope could be cut just far enough through so that it would hold in a mild wind, then snap in a heavy one, just when it was most badly needed. No evidence of any tampering with the rigging.

"Let's go below. That's where the prowler was when we got here. He must have been doing his dirty work down there," Biff said.

A careful search of the cabins, each with two berths, revealed nothing.

"Hey, look at this!" Li called. He was in the engine

compartment, a small space between the forward cabin and the galley. "Doesn't it look to you as if this has been moved recently?"

Li pointed to the wooden cover which housed the engine. It was sitting slightly askew.

"We'll take a look underneath." Biff took one side of the housing, Li the other.

"Careful now. Heave gently."

They removed the housing.

"Must be a flashlight around here somewhere. Have to have one if we're going to find anything."

Li found one in the tool chest.

Biff took it and directed its beam of light on the top of the engine.

"Nice little engine. A four-cylinder Indian Marine. Ought to shove us along around eight or ten knots."

He placed the light's beam over the engine, inch by inch. Suddenly he brought the light's rays to a fixed spot. Biff bent low.

"Never saw anything like this on one of these engines. Take a look, Li."

Li bent down beside Biff.

The boys were looking at a crudely made object, resembling a small tin can. It was roughly attached just below the engine's carburetor.

"Let's get out of here," Biff said, swallowing. His throat had become dry and tight. "That thing's a bomb—a homemade bomb."

Li was already heading back to the cockpit.

"Alloo there! Ship ahoy!" came a cry from the dock.

Biff and Li burst on deck just as his father and Mr. Mahenili started to step aboard.

"Stay back, Dad! Stay back! There's a bomb on the boat!" Biff yelled.

Breathlessly, the boys told their fathers of spotting the prowler on board, of the brief tussle, and the results of their investigation.

"It's a good thing we came down," Tom Brewster said. "You were late. We thought you might have run up against something."

"We sure did, Dad," Biff assured him.

"I'll have to investigate. Can you tell me exactly where this thing you think is a bomb is located?"

"You're not going on board, are you, Dad?" Biff asked, his voice filled with anxiety.

"I think it will be all right. I have an idea that bomb isn't intended to go off while the boat's still in harbor."

"But, Dad, it might," Biff protested.

"Biff, I've handled dynamite and other types of explosives in my work. I was also in the bomb demolition service in the army. I can handle it. You stay back, though, all of you, until I give you an all-clear. Now just where is this thing you found?"

"Directly under the carburetor," Biff replied.

"Here, you'll need this." He handed his father the flashlight.

They watched Mr. Brewster's head disappear as he moved down the steps from the cockpit to the first cabin.

"I think we'd better follow your father's orders, boys," Hank Mahenili said. "We'll put a little distance between us and the boat—just in case."

The three moved an anchor rope's length from the stern of the boat.

The minutes went by. The waiting became almost unbearable. Biff couldn't control the feeling of fear gnawing at the pit of his stomach. Any moment, he expected to hear the dull thud of an explosion. He expected to see the boat burst open, sending wood and debris flying through the air.

Minutes ticked on. Each one seemed an hour to Biff. At last, he saw his father emerge from the cockpit.

"I've got it. It's all right."

Biff ran to where his father stood. It may have been all right, but Biff could tell by the beads of perspiration standing out on his father's forehead and by his soaked shirt, that it had been a ticklish job.

"It's a bomb, all right. Perez Soto is playing for keeps," Mr. Brewster said grimly. He wiped his forehead. "It's a simple thing, really. Anyone with Perez

Soto's experience, or mine, for that matter, could make it."

"But when was it set to go off?" Biff asked.

"That would depend on when and how long we used the auxiliary engine. See this timer?"

The three leaned forward for a closer look, peering warily at the infernal machine Biff's father held in his hand.

"This timer, which is hooked up to the detonator, is fixed so it starts in motion when the engine is started. It cuts out when the engine is out. Very clever, actually, even though it is simple."

"When would the timer fire the charge?" Biff asked.

"I'd judge after about an hour, perhaps two—no more—after the engine had been running."

"We'd be out in the middle of the ocean by then." Biff looked at Li and Mr. Mahenili. Both shook their heads.

"Worse than that, Biff, if I've got it figured right."

"How, Dad?"

"Well, Perez Soto would know that we'd use the engine to get us out of the harbor. Maybe a twenty-minute run. Then we'd go to sail. And we'd use sail every minute we could. But then—this is the really devilish clever part of his plan." Mr. Brewster paused. He turned to Li's father.

"Didn't you tell me that there are some dangerous reefs off Ka Lae?"

"You bet there are," Mr. Mahenili said. "And the water's shark-infested, too."

"Well, to search the coast along there for Huntington's sunken sloop, we'd have to use the engine. Couldn't take a chance with sail on those ragged coral reefs."

"I'm beginning to catch on, Dad," Biff said soberly.

"I expected you would."

"We'd have to use the engine, as you said. And right in the midst of those reefs, and those sharks, *bang!* The boat would have blown up—"

"And that would have been the end of us," Thomas Brewster said quietly. He tossed the deactivated bomb overboard.

"Rest in pieces," Biff said fervently.

CHAPTER XIII

A Near Miss

"EVERYTHING all clear?" Mr. Brewster called out from his position at the tiller in the yawl, *Easy Action.*

"Aye, aye, sir," Biff called back to his father. Biff held on to the bow line, loosely circled over a piling at the dock.

"Cast off, then," Tom Brewster ordered.

Biff flicked the rope, snaking it over the piling, as the *Easy Action* was cleared. Biff heard the low growl of the reverse gear as his father backed easily away from the wharf. A shift to forward, the engine revved up higher, and the yawl headed out of the harbor at Hana.

It was a clear night, bright stars lighting up the

skies over the Hawaiian Islands. A slight sliver of a new moon could just be seen rising in the east.

The yawl ran on its auxiliary engine for fifteen minutes, putting the harbor behind it. When they were well clear, and in open sea, Mr. Brewster cut the engine.

"All hands to," he called. "Prepare to hoist sail."

A yawl is a fore-and-aft rigged vessel. It has a large mainmast forward, and a much smaller mast set abaft or behind the tiller, or wheel.

Hank Mahenili and his son Li had hold of the halyards at the mainmast, ready to pull on the lines to raise the main and jib sails.

Biff would handle the mizzen or aft sail by himself.

"Heave away, me hearties," Mr. Brewster ordered.

The three "hearties" heaved, and the sails slid up their masts, and billowed gently out, catching a soft, warm wind. The sails were set and trimmed.

"Okay, Biff, you take over now."

Biff came into the cockpit and took the tiller over from his father.

"Keep her headed as she is now. The compass setting is for Upolu Point. We ought to make it easily by daybreak, and then we'll cruise the western coast of the Big Island."

"Heading for Ka Lae, Dad?" Biff asked.

"That's right, Biff. Hank and I are going to turn

in now. You and Li handle the ten-to-two watch. Wake us up at two, then you boys can grab some sleep."

Li joined Biff in the cockpit.

The *Easy Action* lived up to her name. She slid effortlessly through the water, noiseless except for the soft swish of her bow cleaving a path. The wind held steady. There was nothing to do but hold her on course.

"Like sailing, Li?" Biff asked.

"It's the greatest. I'll take sail over power any day." Li spoke as if he were an old salt.

"Not so good for water skiing, though," Biff said. "You need more speed for that, quick speed, fast starts."

"Oh, sure. But for a cruise like we're taking, give me sail."

The boys were quiet. The spell of the night settled over them. Li, Biff knew, dozed off from time to time. He himself felt drowsy, lulled into sleepiness by the slight rise and fall of the craft as it rode over the swells.

Biff looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was nearly twelve o'clock. He nudged the sleeping Li.

"Hey, you're supposed to be on this watch with me. How 'bout taking over for a while?"

Li rubbed his eyes, stretched, and yawned.

"Aye, aye, Captain." He took the tiller.

Biff stood up, stretched his body, then settled into a more comfortable position. He fought off sleep, but knew he dozed now and again in short, five-minute catnaps. He was never far from consciousness, though. And if anything happened—say a quickening of the wind—he would have been alert immediately.

At two o'clock, a widely yawning Tom Brewster emerged from the cabin, followed by Hank Mahenili.

"All right, boys. We'll take over now. Get some sleep. At this steady pace, we'll reach Upolu long before daylight. We'll drop anchor, then set out again at daybreak."

Upolu is the northernmost point on the Island of Hawaii.

Biff and Li were asleep the moment they hit their berths. It seemed to Biff he had only just gone to sleep when he felt his father shaking his shoulder.

"Rise and shine, Biff. Almost daylight. We're shoving off as soon as we have some grub."

Under a bright morning sun, the *Easy Action* got under way again. Biff was at the tiller. His father and Hank Mahenili, tired from their early morning watch, dozed on the foredeck in comfortable captain's chairs.

Biff and Li had their work cut out for them. The course set was a zigzag one. They wanted to cruise

as much of the coastline as possible in the hope of spotting some sign of Huntington's sunken sloop.

Biff would head the *Easy Action* off shore, run out nearly ten miles, then tack back in. For every three miles they progressed down the coast toward Ka Lae, the southern tip of Hawaii, they covered nearly twenty miles out and back from the coast.

A stiff morning breeze sent the *Easy Action* skipping briskly over the waves. They had covered a good distance by eight bells, twelve o'clock noon.

Biff and Li took turns at the tiller. When Li was the steerer, Biff stood on the highest point of the foredeck, near the ship's bow, scanning the waters on either side with powerful binoculars. When it was his time to take over the wheel, Li took up the vigil.

They reached Kailua on the Kona coast as the sun, like a blazing ball, settled into the Pacific Ocean to the west. They were halfway to Ka Lae, the southern cape.

The party went ashore for a steak dinner at the famous Kona Steak House, then came back to their boat filled with food and tired. All turned in at once. No watch was set. None of them saw the black-hulled power cruiser come in and drop its anchor nearby. Then the captain of the cruiser, having spotted the *Easy Action*, weighed anchor and moved off to an anchorage out of sight from the crew of the yawl.

The next morning the search was continued, the yawl weaving its way in and out along the coast, drawing nearer to Ka Lae, nearer to the position at which Huntington had last been heard from.

"I'll take the tiller now, Biff," his father said. "Hank and I will alternate. I want you and Li to keep a constant watch. Your young eyes are sharper than ours."

The *Easy Action* spent the day crisscrossing a wide area of water between the shore line and a distance outside the coral shoals, varying from five to twelve miles.

Nightfall found them off Ka Lae, or South Cape. They anchored in thirty feet of clear water, about a quarter of a mile off shore. They could see the white combers lashing at the rocky formation of the beach.

"We'll combine our evening meal with a council of war," Tom Brewster said, once the ship was made tight for the night.

"You figure we're in the danger area now, Dad?" Biff asked.

"Huntington's sloop is on the bottom of the ocean somewhere in this area."

"And Perez Soto is looking for it just as hard as we are," Hank Mahenili added.

"What about Dr. Weber?" Biff asked. "Do you think he's aboard Perez Soto's boat, or do you think he's being held on shore?"

"Hard to say, Biff. My feeling is that he's being held on shore. A captive on a boat could be too easily spotted at a refueling wharf."

"Don't you think, Dad, that we ought to divide up now?" Biff suggested. "Two of us make a shore search for Dr. Weber, the other two cruise around and try to spot the sunken sloop?"

"Good idea, Biff. We'll do that tomorrow," Mr. Brewster agreed. "Hank and I will go ashore. You and Li conduct the sea search."

That suited Biff and Li just fine. They looked at one another and smiled.

"Now tonight, I don't think it's necessary to have a standing watch. There's been no sign of Perez Soto so far. But one of us ought to sleep on deck. Any volunteers?" Biff's father asked.

"Me, Dad." Biff jumped at the chance. "I'd love to. Nice warm night. The sleeping will be better under the stars than it will be in the cabin."

"Okay, let's all turn in. Big day ahead."

Biff spread out a sleeping bag on the *Easy Action*'s foredeck. He lay on his back, his eyes staring up and the millions of stars twinkling in the sky overhead. The sound of the surf came distinctly. It was a soothing sound, and shortly Biff was lulled to sleep.

Some hours later, he was awakened slowly. He heard the distant throb of a powerful engine. At first, Biff thought it must be an airplane. But then, as he

became wider awake, he realized the throbbing came not from the air, but the sea. It grew louder as the craft, whatever it was, drew nearer.

Biff sat up, propping himself on one arm. Now there was no mistaking it. A boat, one with a powerful engine, was rapidly approaching the *Easy Action*'s anchorage. Biff stood up. He peered into the starlight night. He could see the reflection of stars twinkling on the water's surface. Then he made out the outlines of a cabin cruiser throwing a fan-tail white wake, heading fast toward the *Easy Action.*

"Fools," Biff muttered to himself, "if they don't change course, they'll ram us."

He knew the white-hulled yawl was sharply outlined against the starlit waters. Then he suddenly knew what was happening. The on-charging cruiser was aiming at the yawl. It *meant* to ram her.

Biff raised a cry. It was too late. His voice was drowned out by the roar of the cruiser's engines—Biff knew now that it was a twin-engined craft.

Now the boat seemed on top of the yawl. Its bow, with a much higher freeboard than the low-lying yawl, reared up menacingly only twenty feet from the sailing craft. Surely it would crash them, ram them, send them to the bottom of the sea, with Biff's father, Hank Mahenili, and Li trapped below.

Biff yelled.

At the last moment, the cruiser swerved sharply to

the starboard, making an almost right-angle turn. It roared alongside the *Easy Action*, not ten feet separating the two boats.

As the cruiser made its fast, skidding turn, it threw up a tremendous wave. Biff saw the wave sweeping toward the yawl. Then, tons of foaming water cascaded over the *Easy Action*. Biff grabbed for the mainmast, wrapping his arms around it in a death lock. He felt the wave tugging at his body. It took all his strength to prevent being swept overboard.

The wave passed on over, tumbling gallons of water into the cabins below.

Biff released his grip on the mainmast. He sprinted to the cockpit. It was nearly filled with water.

"Dad! Dad! You all right?"

He started to plunge into the water-filled cabin and was met by his father, Hank, and Li fighting their way out, gasping for breath, trying to expel water from their choked lungs.

The black cruiser had sped away, the throb of its engines barely audible now.

Everyone was all right. But what a mess! Bedding was soaked. Galley equipment, pots, pans, dishes had been swept off shelves, some of the pans bobbing like corks in the swirling waters inside the ship's cabin.

Biff went into action. Maybe he could start the engine before the water did its damage. He splashed through the water and reached the engine compart-

ment. He pulled open the door. It had held back the flood from the engine room. Before the water could rush in and fill up that compartment, Biff had the engine going. He quickly turned on the yawl's sea pumps. He stood there with his fingers crossed, hoping the engine wouldn't conk out. It didn't. The heavy-duty pumps worked perfectly. Already the water inside the boat was beginning to recede.

Biff joined his father, Hank Mahenili, and Li in the cockpit. They were still dazed and only now beginning to breathe easily.

"I thought he was going to ram us, Dad."

Mr. Brewster shook his head.

"I get it now," Biff continued. "To ram us would have damaged *his* boat—put it out of commission, even if it didn't sink. He wanted to swamp us."

"And nearly did!" Mr. Mahenili said.

The steady beat of the pumps continued. They were rapidly bailing the yawl out.

"Well, Biff, you know what we're really up against now," his father said seriously.

"I think I always did, Dad. This Perez Soto will stop at nothing."

Li sat quietly, but he was shaking as if from a chill. It was the recent frightening experience which caused him to tremble.

"Tom, I've been in and around water, in and out of boats all my life. But that was the nearest brush I've

ever had with a watery grave." Hank Mahenili's voice was solemn. "He'll never get away with it," he added fiercely.

The next hour was spent in straightening up the water damage. Bedding was brought on deck and spread to dry. Li was elected cook, to make coffee and hot tea. Dawn was spreading before the *Easy Action* was shipshape again.

After a hot meal, Mr. Brewster took Biff aside.

"Biff, we're not going to let last night's incident change our plans. Hank and I are going ashore immediately. You and Li put out and start the search at once. We've got to stop Perez Soto before he stops us. Come below with me for a moment."

Biff followed his father into the cabin. He saw him open his bag. When he turned around, he was holding a revolver in his hand.

"You know how to use this, Biff. You've practiced enough."

"Yes, Dad."

"You're not to use it, except in the most extreme emergency. You're to use it only to repel anyone trying to board this boat."

Biff nodded his head gravely. Mr. Brewster replaced the weapon and left the cabin to join Hank Mahenili. Biff and Li watched their fathers as they headed for shore in the yawl's dinghy.

CHAPTER XIV

Storm!

THE boys watched the dinghy plunge into the surf near the shore. They saw it picked up by a breaking roller, and carried on its crest to the shore. They saw the two men pull the dinghy high up on the shore and hide it behind some low, spreading growth.

"They're taking no chances," Biff said to Li. "We've got to be equally careful."

Biff's voice held a grim tone. The memory of the night before was still vivid in his mind. Li's face was solemn, too, his round brown eyes serious.

"You're the captain, Biff."

Biff smiled. He didn't want Li to become too alarmed.

"Okay, my friend. Let's put out to sea. I can handle the mainsail and the jib. You stand by the tiller. We'll hoist the mizzen after we're heading out."

Biff ran the mainsail up, leaped to the bow of the boat, and started hauling in the anchor on a hand winch. It took a lot of effort. The anchor was heavy, and he had to raise it thirty feet. The *Easy Action*, a spanking off-shore breeze in its sail, was already plowing through the sea before Biff had the anchor safely stowed.

Once the anchor was stowed, Biff went back to the cockpit.

"How'm I doing, Biff? Heading the right way?" Li asked.

"Point her a little more to the southwest. I'll raise the mizzen."

Biff finished his seaman's job and dropped down in the cockpit beside Li for a breather.

"I'll take over now, Li. You go forward and be the lookout. Take the binoculars," he suggested.

All morning they continued their crisscrossing course. The high noon sun blazed down on them. The heat soon dried the bedding. Biff heaved to long enough to carry the bedding below and make up the berths.

They had a sandwich, then stretched out on the hot deck for a brief rest. The boat drifted.

"Where do you think we are now, Li?" Biff asked.

Li looked shoreward. They could just make out the coastline.

"I think we've rounded Ka Lae. Must be just off the black sand beach."

"*Black* sand?"

"Yes, Biff. The lava from Kilauea spilled down to the ocean. The surf ground it up into a fine black powder, really finer than sand. That's why it's called the black sand beach. It's all along the Puna coast, all the way up to Hilo—that's a city on the west side of the Big Island."

"I think we ought to change course, then. Head a point or two north by northeast. Then we'll wing back east and return to the anchorage."

Li was at the tiller. He came about, and the *Easy Action* was put on a long reach, pushed briskly along by a southerly wind.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, Biff looked up to see Li coming aft. Biff was at the tiller. He noticed a frown on his Hawaiian friend's face.

"What's up, Li? You sight something?"

"No, Biff," Li shook his head. The serious expression on his face had deepened to one of worry.

"Then what's your trouble? You look like you got trouble." Biff smiled.

"I'm afraid we both may have," Li answered. "Have you noticed it getting any warmer?"

"A little, perhaps. Wind's freshened a bit, too."

"That's it. I'm afraid we're in for some Kona weather."

"Kona weather?"

"Yes, that's what we call a wind coming up from the Equator. Sometimes it reaches gale force. Always there's heavy rain."

Biff looked astern. On the southern horizon, he could make out huge thunderheads.

"Was there a Kona wind when Huntington was lost?"

"Yes. A big one."

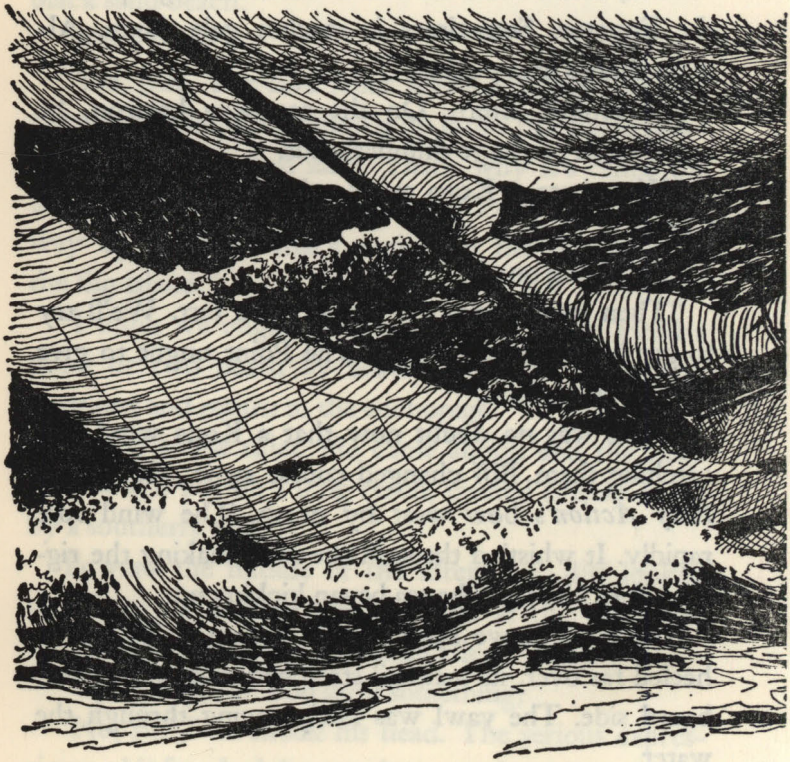
"Then we'd better get out of here fast. We'll try to get back round Ka Lae. The Point ought to give us some protection."

There was no doubt now that a Kona wind was catching them. Biff changed course again. He headed *Easy Action*'s bow west by north. The wind rose rapidly. It whistled through the sails, making the rigging lines vibrate. The sea began kicking up.

The wind drove *Easy Action* before it. The yawl heeled far over, its mainsail stretched taut on the starboard side. The yawl was fairly racing through the water.

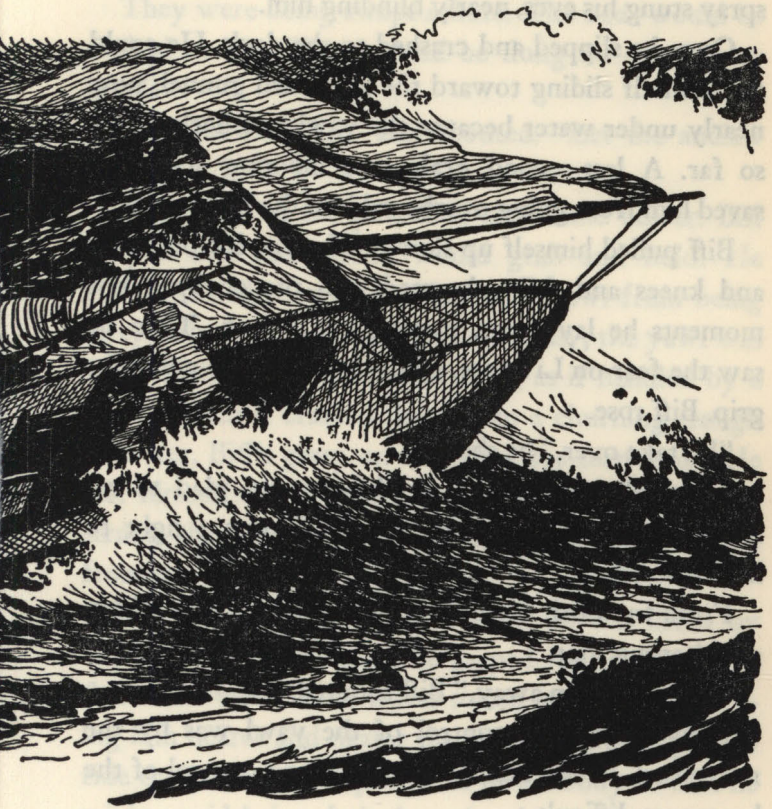
Suddenly they were struck by a torrential downpour. The rain hit the deck in drops as big as half-dollars. The sky had blackened. The shore was blanked out. Angry whitecaps dotted the water like blobs of cotton.

"Take the tiller, Li," Biff shouted above the roar of the wind and the pounding of the rain. "I've got to get the mainsail down."



Biff fought his way forward on the rain-slippery deck. He was pushed along by the driving wind. He reached the mainmast. Its lines were whipping against it, cracking like pistol shots. He loosened the main-

sail halyard. The wind grabbed the mainsail. Biff struggled to pull it down. Suddenly there was a thunderous crack. The mainsail gave way, torn loose from



its halyards. It stretched straight out like a flat, white canopy and flapped violently in the wind, which was now near gale force.

There was no way to cut it loose. Biff let the line

go. The jibsail was still holding. Turning, Biff felt the rain and salt spray beat against his face. He had to bend into a crouch to make any progress aft. The salt spray stung his eyes, nearly blinding him.

Once he slipped and crashed to the deck. He could feel himself sliding toward the starboard gunnel, now nearly under water because the yawl had heeled over so far. A last-second grab at a mooring stanchion saved him from going overboard into the boiling sea.

Biff pulled himself up slowly. He crawled on hands and knees and fell exhausted into the cockpit. For moments he lay there, gasping for breath. Then he saw the fear on Li's face. Li held the tiller in a viselike grip. Biff rose.

"I'll take over," he shouted.

Li merely nodded his head in assent, glad to relinquish the wooden tiller handle. It was a fight to hold it steady.

From forward, the boys heard another crack, sharp as a shotgun shot.

"Jibsail's given away," Biff shouted.

Now their only control of the yawl was by the mizzensail. It was behind them, making control of the boat most difficult.

"If the mizzen goes," Biff yelled, "we're done for!"

Just as he spoke the words, the mizzen gave way, torn from its halyard by a sudden driving gust. At the same moment, the boys heard a sound that sent an

even greater chill of fear racing up and down their spines. It was the roar of an angry surf pounding the shore.

They were being swept ashore. The boat would be dashed to bits. They would be flung on razor-sharp coral!

"Get forward, Li," Biff shouted. "Let the anchor go!"

The sound of the pounding surf came nearer. Biff prayed that the anchor would grab and hold. He fought the tiller, trying to keep the yawl from being swept ashore broadside. Then, suddenly, the yawl was lifted high on the crest of a roller, as if handled by a giant. When it crashed down into a churning trough of water, Biff's grasp on the tiller was torn loose. He felt himself being hurled through the air. Then he struck the water with a thud, knocking the wind from his lungs.

Biff felt himself go under. Then he was lifted by another roller. Surfacing, he gasped for air. His arms flailed the water. The waves tossed him about, carrying him nearer and nearer the shore. Biff struggled to ride the waves, to keep control of his body so that he might avoid being dashed on the shore. He was hoping against hope that this would be a sand, not coral beach.

After a seemingly endless struggle, Biff, kicking out, felt his feet touch bottom. Nothing had ever

felt so good before. His feet were touching a powdery sand, now roiled up, but at least, it wasn't a coral bottom.

Biff found himself in waist-deep water. The shoreline was only a few feet in front of him. He staggered through the surf, reached the black sand beach, and threw himself face down on the sand. Every muscle in his body felt as if it had been pounded, pummeled, pulled, and strained.

Then he thought of Li. He turned over and rose to his knees. He saw the *Easy Action.* Her anchor had caught and held. She was pounding up and down on the rough waters, but Biff could see that she was holding.

But where was Li?

Biff stood up. He went to the water's edge. He walked out until the water raced around his knees. Cupping his hands to his mouth, he shouted:

"Li! Li!"

There was no answer.

CHAPTER XV

Men Missing

BIFF stood on the beach calling out his friend's name again and again. His voice shook with effort, trying to drown out the noises of surf and sea.

The wind was dying down slightly, but the surf was still too rough and dangerous for Biff to try to reach the boat, which stood one hundred feet off shore.

Biff's eyes searched the beach, hoping to spot Li swimming ashore. No such welcome sight met his eyes.

To his left, about a quarter of a mile away, Biff could see a formation of lava rock jutting out into the sea. He thought his friend Li might have gotten to shore on the other side of the lava promontory.

Biff ran down the beach. His pounding heart sank when he reached the ugly, grayish-black rock, stretching out into the sea. Its side was smooth, rising upward some thirty feet. There was no place Biff could spot where he could gain a foothold to climb to its top.

Around the base of the lava cliff, the water dashed and swirled, making it impossible for Biff to swim around to the other side.

Biff went back to the spot on the beach directly opposite the *Easy Action*. He sank down on the wet sand, filled with despair. He felt certain now that his good friend Li must be lost in the ocean.

Night settled over a lonely, saddened Biff. The rain had stopped. The wind was dying down. The surf was losing some of its angry roar. Sleep, a sleep Biff felt he could never attain, finally came to the tired, worried boy. With it came release for his troubled mind.

By morning, the wind was gone. The sea was smooth, and the sky was blue over Hawaii once again.

Biff saw the yawl rocking gently at its anchor. Its sails torn, tattered, drooped from the masts like the banners of a defeated army. There was no sign of Li.

There was only one thing to do. He must search the nearby coast for his lost friend.

Biff swam out to the yawl. A quick inspection

showed the *Easy Action* to be a stout ship. She had taken on little water. Her seams had held. Her masts had stood the strain. Biff took out the emergency suit of sail and rigged them to the halyards. He started the engine, let it idle as he raised the anchor, then put out to sea.

He ran on engine past the lava promontory, bringing the boat as close into shore as he felt safe. No sign of Li.

Biff put back out to sea, raised the jibsail and cruised along the coast, his eyes constantly scanning the shoreline. He didn't know how far down the Big Island he sailed, but he dreaded turning about and giving up. Finally, he felt he had to. He had to get back to where he had left his father and Mr. Mahenili and tell them the tragic news.

Biff came about. Now he sailed in the opposite direction. He rounded the lava promontory, lashed the tiller, and went forward to raise the mainsail.

Returning to the cockpit, Biff cast a final look at the spot on the black beach where he had spent the night. His heart leaped. There was someone on the beach, jumping up and down, waving madly. Li!

With a shout of happiness, Biff turned the yawl inshore. Li had already dashed into the water, and was swimming toward the approaching boat.

Biff came about quickly, heading the yawl into the wind. Li reached its side, and Biff pulled him aboard.

He threw his arms around Li's wet body and hugged him in sheer happiness. Then he stepped back and sized Li up carefully. Except for some scratches, and a deep gash on one leg, Li looked fine.

"I thought you were a goner," Biff said.

"Nope, old Davy Jones hasn't got me in his locker yet."

"What happened? Where've you been?"

Li grinned. "I fell overboard. I'd just let go the anchor when my foot got caught and I went over. A current caught me and carried me away from the boat. The anchor must have dragged for quite a distance before it caught, because when I finally made shore, the yawl wasn't in sight."

"Where'd you land? The other side of that lava cliff?"

"Yep. And there was no way to get over it."

"I know that. I walked down the beach to the cliff, but it can't be climbed from this side, either."

Both boys were silent for a minute, thinking about their narrow escape.

"So what did you do, Li?"

"I started up the cliff, the side of it. I had to find some way of getting over it, hoping to find you safe on the other side."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, it was growing dark. I slipped several times, cut myself, too."

"I see you did. We better put some antiseptic on that cut."

"I've already cleaned it out with salt water. Stung like the dickens."

"We'll still do some more doctoring. Now get on with your story," Biff ordered.

"Well, I knew I wouldn't make it at night, so I found a protected spot and went to sleep. This morning, I made my way farther up the cliff, found a place where I could cross, and came over to this side."

"And I was gone."

"Yes, Biff. When I finally made it here, I could have died. No Biff. No boat."

"I was looking for you. I must have sailed two or three miles down the coast, trying to spot you."

"That's what I finally figured out, Biff. I thought that since the boat was gone and there was no wreckage on the beach, old E.A. hadn't smashed up. So, putting my two heads together, I also figured you must be safe and had gone hunting for me. So I just sat and waited. Boy, when you rounded that promontory, was I ever glad!"

"Me too, when I saw you jumping around like a crazy Indian!"

The boys smiled at each other. Their smiles turned to laughter, and for a few moments they let themselves go in a wild laughing bout.

"I should have known," Biff said, simmering down

at last. "I should have known that Likake Mahenili, champion swimmer of the Islands, could take care of himself."

"It was close, though, Biff."

"I'll say it was."

Biff put the *Easy Action* on a course for the spot where the dinghy had been beached. They sailed through the morning and well into the afternoon before they spotted their landmarks. Biff anchored the yawl. Both had felt sure their parents would be waiting for them on the beach. There was no sign of either man.

"What do we do now, Biff?"

Biff shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I don't know, Li. All we can do is wait. It'll be dark, soon. We can't search for them at night."

"Biff, you don't think that maybe Perez Soto—" Li couldn't finish his sentence.

Biff knew the worried thoughts which must be running through his friend's mind. The same thoughts were racing through his own. Had his father and Mr. Mahenili been trapped by the enemy?

CHAPTER XVI

Held Prisoner

HIGH up the side of Mauna Loa volcano, Tom Brewster and Hank Mahenili turned their binoculars on the sea 10,000 feet below them and several miles away.

The men scanned the coastline, inch by inch, searching for any activity on the wide horizon.

"Can't spot the *Easy Action*, Hank. Can you?" Tom Brewster asked.

"No. But look over there. To your right. Line up on that tall palm tree, couple hundred feet down."

Tom Brewster followed his friend's directions. He adjusted his glasses. As the focus became sharp, he

spotted a black object, apparently a boat, anchored off shore.

"Couldn't that be a black power boat? Looks like it to me, Tom," Hank said.

Brewster studied the boat for a minute before replying. "I think it is. I'm sure it is. That must be Perez Soto's boat."

Mahenili had turned his glasses in the direction where the *Easy Action* should be riding at anchor.

"I'm getting worried about the boys, Tom."

"Oh, they'll be all right. They'll be coming into sight any moment now. Anything in particular worrying you? We've spotted Perez Soto's boat. They haven't had any trouble with him."

It was late afternoon. Hank Mahenili had turned his glasses to the south, looking out over Ka Lae.

"See that cloud formation to the south?" he said. "It's building up fast. It could be a Kona wind coming up."

"Maybe we'd better start down, then," Mr. Brewster suggested.

The two men had descended only halfway down the side of the volcano when the Kona storm struck. They had to halt. It was too dangerous to make the steep descent in the raging storm, the same storm that had hit the *Easy Action* two hours earlier.

The high wind, ripping and roaring, whining against the side of the mountain, was followed by a sheet of

rain. Tom Brewster and Hank Mahenili had to scramble for any cover they could find. They located a small but deep depression, more of a pocket than a cave, and dived into it. Water trickled in, wetting them, but it was better than being in the open with the rain and wind lashing at them.

Shortly after nightfall, the storm lessened. There was no question of trying to continue their descent.

"Have to make the best of it for the night," Mr. Brewster said.

"What about the boys?" Hank asked.

"Nothing we can do, Hank. Don't think I'm not worried. I am. But I do trust Biff. He's been up against many a tough situation and has always come through. He will this time, too. And so will Li." Tom hoped his strong tone of confidence would be imparted to his friend. He knew that the Mahenilis weren't accustomed to running into the dangerous situations that had been a part of his own life for many years, and recently, had become almost a pattern for Biff, too.

Henry Mahenili was made of stout stuff, too. He also knew that, when faced with a situation where there was no immediate out, the best thing to do was to face up to it and hope for the best.

Tom Brewster changed the subject.

"I've an idea, Hank. I base it on seeing that black power boat anchored off shore."

"What is it, Tom?"

"I think that Perez Soto and whoever is working with him must be ashore. I think they must have Dr. Weber with them. It would be too easy to spot someone being held captive in as confined a space as a boat."

"I'm with you in that thinking, Tom."

"Tell me this, then. Don't you think they must have a hideout somewhere nearby? They wouldn't want to be too far from their anchorage. They'd want to be able to get to their boat quickly if any definite news came about the location of Huntington's sunken sloop."

"There are all sorts of places around here, Tom. Lean-tos, shacks. Finding one certain hideout won't be simple. There's also a lot of the Mauna Loa, too. Don't expect too much too soon."

"I know. But I won't rest until I've made every effort to find Dr. Weber."

"Well, Tom, if we don't rest now, we won't have the strength to continue our search. Let's try to get some sleep."

"Good idea."

They spent a restless night in their cramped, wet quarters. Daylight, with a bright sun already sending up steam vapors as it dried the wet mountain side, was a welcome relief.

The first thing both men did was to scan the shore line again with their binoculars, searching for the *Easy*

Action. Failure to spot her increased the worry in both men's minds. Neither spoke of the matter. Each knew how greatly concerned the other was. But there was no point in dumping one worry upon another.

"Come on, Hank. Let's get back on down. The boys may be there when we arrive."

They started on down the side of Mauna Loa. At an elevation of about one thousand feet, almost directly opposite the anchored black power boat, they halted for a breather. They were only a mile or so from the shore. Their intention was to cut to their left, now that the going was easier at the lower altitude. The descent was no longer so precipitate.

They headed almost due south now. They stayed at the same elevation, stopping now and again to sweep the coast line with their glasses. At one halt, Tom Brewster placed a retaining hand on Mahenili just as he started off.

"Hold it a moment, Hank," Tom said in a low voice. "Hear anything?"

Hank Mahenili listened. In a few moments, he nodded his head.

"Sound like voices to you?"

"Yes. And angry ones."

"Come along then, let's find out."

The voices seemed to be coming from a point below them, not too far below, and just a bit to their right.

They proceeded most cautiously in the direction of the voices, careful not to start any pebbles or small stones rolling downward. Easing themselves down, the two men came to a ledge. It projected out like the roof of a shed or porch. Tom Brewster got down on his stomach. He wormed his way forward. The voices were coming, it appeared, from directly beneath him.

Inching ahead, Tom Brewster came to the edge of the ledge. Carefully, he craned his head forward and looked down. He saw the tops of two men's heads. A third man was stretched out on a makeshift bed of brush, covered with a worn cloth.

The third man was Dr. Weber. The doctor's cheeks were sunken. His color was bad. He looked completely ill and worn out. Towering over the doctor was Perez Soto. Thomas Brewster couldn't see the other man's face, but he knew it must have anger written on it from the tone of his voice.

Dr. Weber groaned as he turned on his side. Brewster could see that his hands were bound behind his back. His ankles were also lashed together.

"You old fool!" Perez Soto said. "Why should it make any difference to you whether I get the cesium or Brewster gets it? You're a scientist. Bah! A scientist should put his science before all else."

Brewster heard the doctor's reply in a voice barely audible: "There are certain things even a scientist

places a greater value on—friendship, loyalty, humanity."

Perez Soto leaned over the old man, his arm raised as if to strike him. Brewster had all he could do to keep himself from leaping off the ledge onto Perez Soto's back. But Soto's henchman stood, gun in hand, by the old man's side.

"I give you this day, and no more, my fine doctor," Perez Soto said. "By nightfall, if you do not reveal to me the location of the cesium strike, the world will lose one of its most eminent scientists!"

CHAPTER XVII

A Dangerous Dive

BIFF and Li were up with the first rays of daylight. After a hurried breakfast, they prepared to go ashore.

"Do you think it's safe to leave the boat unguarded, Biff?" Li wanted to know.

"No, I don't. I know darn well that Perez Soto would like nothing better than to find the *Easy Action* with no one aboard and scuttle her."

"What do we do then?"

"We take that chance," Biff said grimly. "We've got to. Finding our fathers is more important than all the yawls and all the cesium in the world."

Li smiled in agreement. "We're going to be awfully wet when we get ashore."

The dinghy was still secreted behind beach brush. The yawl had no other.

"Couldn't you kind of kick your way ashore, swimming on your back, Li?" Biff asked.

"Sure, Biff. Why?"

"Well, here's what you try to do. Jump overboard. Turn on your back. I'll hand you some dry shorts and sweat shirts. Hold them out of water over your head and see if you can make shore that way."

"I'll try, Biff. But I don't know. Getting through the surf isn't going to be easy. Probably get the clothes wet anyway."

"We'll try it. And if they do get wet, the sun will dry 'em fast."

Li dived into the ocean. He plunged around like a porpoise for a few moments, enjoying and getting the feel of the water. Then he turned on his back and kicked to the side of the yawl. Biff handed down a bundle of clothing, and Li propelled himself away from the boat with a powerful thrust against its side.

Biff slung a pair of binoculars in a waterproof case around his neck and slipped into the water.

Li's progress was slow. His leg thrusts were those of an excellent backstroke swimmer, but unable to use his arms, he couldn't go very fast. Biff stayed alongside him.

"I'm going ahead when we reach the shore breakers," Biff called to Li. "I'm taller than you. Maybe I

can reach bottom, and take the clothes from you before a wave rolls over you."

It was a good plan. But the sea has a way of upsetting good plans, and it did this time. Boys and clothes reached shore equally wet. They wrung out their shorts and sweat shirts as best they could, donned them, and headed up the southern slope of the Mauna Loa in the area called Kau.

They toiled upward, resting at regular intervals. It was hot, tiring work. Their wet clothes clung to their bodies. Perspiration from the effort kept their clothes damp. Even in the heat, Biff found himself shivering convulsively.

"I've got a clammy feeling from these clothes. Guess that's why I'm shivering," Biff said to his friend. He hoped it *was* the damp clothing, rather than fear for the safety of his father and Hanale Mahenili.

By noon, the boys had climbed nearly three thousand feet.

"Let's take a break," Biff called.

"By me, fine. That was a tough climb," Li answered.

Biff stretched out. Li remained seated.

"Let me have the glasses, Biff."

Biff handed them over, shielded his eyes from the sun, and tried to catch a catnap. He was just dozing off when he felt Li nudge him.

"Biff! Biff!" The excitement in Li's voice brought Biff to a sitting position in a hurry.

"What is it, Li?"

"Over there, see? About halfway between Ka Lae and that point to the north—Jauna Point."

"Yes. But how can I see anything without the glasses?"

Li unslung them from around his neck and handed them to Biff. "Now, look. Follow the direction of my arm. About half a mile, I'd guess, off shore. Almost exactly between Ka Lae and Kauna Point."

"I'm following you, Li."

"Move your glasses around in a tight area of a few hundred yards. See if you spot a dark object on the bottom of the ocean."

The boys were looking almost straight down. From his many flights over water, Biff knew that from above, one could see through the water to depths of forty to fifty feet with ease. The water acted as a magnifying glass.

He moved the glasses in a tight circle. Then he spotted what had caused all Li's excitement. Lying on the bottom of the ocean was a dark object. It was slender, about forty feet long, Biff judged.

"Do you think it could be, Biff? Think it could be a boat?"

Biff didn't want to raise either his own or Li's hopes too high.

"Couldn't it be a coral formation, Li?" he asked.

"Gee, I don't think so, Biff. There'd be more then one formation of coral around. It's mighty rare to find just a sliver stuck out somewhere in the ocean."

"Then it could be a boat! A boat on the bottom of the ocean."

"Huntington's boat?"

"Could be, Li. But let's not get our hopes up too high."

"Let's go. Let's get back to the *Easy Action* and cruise over there. We've got to find out."

Before agreeing, Biff thought about his father and Hank Mahenili. Should the boys continue the search? After all, the same storm that had forced him and Li to spend the night ashore could well have caused the fathers to take shelter. Perhaps their parents even now were back at the beach opposite the anchorage, or even aboard the yawl. Biff made his decision.

"Okay, Li. Let's go," Biff said.

The boys reached the beach opposite the *Easy Action*'s anchorage in half the time it had taken them to make the ascent. Downhill, all the way.

"We'll take the dinghy out," Biff said. "Won't do our parents any good if the yawl isn't here."

Their haste matched the excitement growing inside them about their find. Of course, both knew they could be in for a great disappointment. Biff pushed that depressing thought out of his mind.

Li upped anchor while Biff got the engine started, then went to the cockpit. Biff took the tiller and pointed the yawl's bow directly out to sea. With a careful eye, he measured the distance from shore until he was sure he was about half a mile out. Then he put the helm of the *Easy Action* hard over to the starboard and cruised parallel to the shore.

"Think you've got that spot well marked in your mind, Li?"

"Sure have, Biff. Remember when we spotted it? There was a large, oval patch of whitish lava just to the left of where we were resting. I'm sure we can spot it from the sea."

"Okay. You be the lookout. I'm going to keep this boat on as true a course as I can. I think we're just about as far off shore now as we figured that sunken boat was. What do you think?"

"Looks right to me. What do you want me to do?"

"You take the glasses. Keep them turned on the Mauna Loa slope. Soon as you pick up that oval lava patch, sing out."

"Aye, aye, captain."

Li went forward with the binoculars. He kept them trained shoreward, aiming them about two thousand feet up the slope.

The distance to the spot the boys had in mind was greater than they had thought it to be. They covered a lot of water. Biff checked his watch. He hoped they

could spot the sunken hulk before the light went.

"Land ho!" Li sang out and came racing back over the deck to the cockpit. "Oval patch coming into sight, captain. Here, take the glasses and see for yourself."

Biff turned the tiller over to Li and took a look. That was the patch, all right. It was off their starboard bow, still a good two miles ahead. Biff revved up the engine, and the *Easy Action*'s auxiliary pushed the yawl along at a good eight knots. In twenty minutes—Biff timed the run, figuring the miles the yawl would cover at full speed—they were dead opposite the lava patch. Biff cut the motor.

"It ought to be somewhere about here," Biff said. "You shin up the mainmast. I'm going to put the yawl in a tight circle, starting right here, then I'll increase the circle every time we make one full turn."

While Li was climbing the mast to a height of about fifteen feet, Biff ducked down into the cabin for a marking buoy. This he tossed overside. Its metal weight plunged to the bottom and held. The red-and-white buoy would be the hub of the circle he would put the yawl into. Biff started the engine again.

"All set, Li."

"Start the merry-go-round," Li called back.

The *Easy Action* made a tight circle. Biff edged the tiller away from him, and the second circle was of a

greater circumference. Biff eased off on the tiller again. The yawl described a larger circle. If the sunken hulk was in that area, there shouldn't be any chance of missing it. The water was clear, the sea calm.

Round and round they went. The bobbing red-and-white marking buoy became a mere speck. Biff could barely make it out with his naked eye.

Half an hour passed; then another. The sun was slanting downward, not more than two hours from its nightly dip into the Pacific.

"Hold it, Biff! Hold it!" came the excited shout from Li.

Biff threw the engine into reverse. He leaped forward and let down the anchor. He turned and looked up at Li, who, shading his eyes, was peering intently into the water off the yawl's portside.

"I've spotted it, Biff. I'm sure of it. If I haven't, well—you come up and take a look."

Li slid down the mast and Biff shinned up. He looked at the spot Li had pointed out. For a time, his eyes were unable to discover any difference as he squinted, looking down into the water. After several minutes, he did make out a formation differing from anything around it. It was a dark object. Biff could think only of a whale, or some other large sea animal, lying on the ocean's floor.

"You're right, Li. There's something down there." He slid down the mast. "But how are we going to find out just what it is?"

Li grinned. "That's easy, Biff. You have on board your ship *Easy Action*, Captain Brewster, none other than the world's record-holding free skin diver, Likake Mahenili."

"You're going to dive down there?" Biff said, awe in his voice.

"Sure. Why not?"

"Well, you're not going to until we sound for the depth here. What's the deepest dive you've ever made, Li?"

"Forty-five, maybe fifty feet if I stretch it a little," Li replied.

Biff got out the sounding line. This was a thin, strong rope. It had a heavy sinker on the end. At intervals of one foot, it had a metal weight to mark off the depth. Biff tossed it overboard. The line seemed to run out endlessly. Biff was afraid the ocean's depth here was going to turn out to be too great for Li to try a dive. Then he felt the thud of the heavy sinker touching bottom. He drew the rope tight.

"Here we go. Let's both count the markers as we pull it up."

Biff worked slowly, carefully. They couldn't risk any mistakes in their count.

When the sinker broke the surface, Biff looked at Li. "How many markers did you count?"

"Forty-three. Does that check with your count?"

"On the nose, Li, on the nose. I make it forty-three too."

"Good. I can make that easy. But, hey, how am I going to know if it's the right boat? What was the name of Mr. Huntington's sloop?"

"The *Sea Islander*, Li."

"Okay. Can you work the boat over a bit? I'd like to be right over her when I make my dive."

"All right, Li. Take up the anchor. Just enough to get it off the bottom. Then let go the second I call."

Biff went back to the cockpit. He pushed the engine's starting button. He had to go forward about ten feet and edge the yawl to the port about fifteen. He shoved the tiller away, putting the boat to the port, and went forward about twenty feet. Then he pulled the tiller to him, put the yawl in reverse, and came back.

"Let 'er go," he called out. He felt the anchor grab. It must be almost alongside the sunken object.

Li came back to the cockpit, darted into the cabin, and came out with a small anchor. It was a spare for the dinghy.

"What do you want that thing for?" Biff demanded.

"A weight. I'm going down with it. It will pull me down a lot faster than I could swim. And forty-three feet is a lot of water."

"I'll say it is. You all ready?"

Li nodded his head. He had changed into brief, skin-tight swim trunks. He walked over to the starboard side of the yawl. He took some wooden matches and hurled them into the water.

"What's that for?" Biff asked.

"I want to find out if there's much flow here. If there's any current. I have to judge my dive by the current."

They watched the matches. They seemed to bob up and down in the same place. Li had tossed them about ten feet from the yawl. As they watched, they saw the distance between yawl and matches closing. It was closing, all right, but slowly.

"Know all I have to, Biff. Very slight current. Nothing to worry about; nothing I have to figure on particularly. Here I go."

Before Biff could even call "good luck," Li, the small anchor held in front of him, plunged into the water.

The wait for Li to surface began.

CHAPTER XVIII

Exploring the Depths

WHEN Likake disappeared beneath the surface, Biff glanced quickly at his watch. He tried to remember the record for a person's holding his breath while under water. Was it three minutes? Four? He remembered reading of some Polynesian divers in Bali who had remained submerged for six minutes.

How long could Li hold his breath? Biff looked at his watch again. Already the sweep hand had passed the two-minute mark.

Biff began to worry. The seconds ticked by slowly, as if held back by a magnet. The three-minute mark was approaching. Surely Li couldn't hold out much longer. Biff's eyes kept shifting from the water to the

How long could Li hold his breath?

sweep hand of his watch. Three minutes! Still no sign of Li. Biff made up his mind. He was going in after Li. He slipped off his watch and peeled off his shirt. Just as he was preparing to dive, Li's head broke the surface.

For several moments, the Hawaiian boy lay in the water, head back, body floating. He needed time to recover. Biff could see his chest heaving up and down beneath the two inches of water covering it. Finally, Li turned his head. He looked up at Biff and smiled. He turned over, and with one powerful stroke, propelled himself to the side of the yawl.

Biff's eager hands helped heave Li overside.

"You all right? You were sure down long enough!" Biff said.

Li nodded his head, his chest still moved in and out as he took deep breaths, exhaling them slowly. Biff was dying to find out what, if anything, Li had learned on his dive, but he didn't want to press his friend.

Li let out a "H-a-a-a-a-a. Boy! Guess that's the deepest I've ever dived."

Biff couldn't stand the suspense any longer.

"And what did you find? Was it a sloop? Was it the *Sea Islander?*"

"Yes to both questions, Biff."

"Whoopee! Eeeowie! We've found it! We've found it!"

Biff grabbed Li by the shoulders and whirled him around.

"You sure, Li? You're positive it's the *Sea Islander?*"

"I'm sure, Biff. There was a life preserver still attached to the side of the sloop's cabin. I could make out the letters spelling the boat's name. And those letters sure did spell out *Sea Islander.*"

"What condition's she in?"

"Well, I couldn't tell much. She's heeled over on her starboard side, I think. Not all the way. Her mast is broken off, as far as I could tell. Some of her ropes are still attached. I brushed against them both going down and coming back up."

Li had stretched out on the deck of the *Easy Action.* Strength was flowing back into his body. Staying submerged as long as he had takes a lot out of a person physically.

"Well, Li. I think we'd better get back to our original anchorage. Your dad and mine must be back there by now. If they're not, well, we'll have to forget about the *Sea Islander* and really look for them. We may have to go for help."

"Before we go, though, Biff, I'd like to go back down to the *Sea Islander*—"

"Again? What in the world for?"

"Not all the way. But don't you think it would be a good idea if we could attach a marker to one of the

loose lines? Then we'd be able to spot this location easily."

"Good idea, Li. How near the surface do those loose lines come?"

"Oh, I'd guess twenty, maybe twenty-five feet. Won't be much of a dive this time. Not after going down over forty feet."

"Okay, Li. You lie there and rest. I'll rig a marking buoy."

Biff went below and took out another buoy from the yawl's captain's chest. This was an all-white one. He attached a short length of nylon rope to the buoy, and a metal clip to the other end of the rope.

Returning to the deck, he showed it to Li. "How will this do? I figure you can tie a fast knot in one of those loose lines, then just snap this metal fastener below the knot. Then it won't slip off."

"Swell, Biff. I've got my breath back now. This won't take a minute."

Li took the buoy. A frown came over his face.

"What's the trouble?" Biff asked.

"Well, with this buoy, it's going to make it tougher to get down. The other time, remember, I had the help of a weight pulling me down—the dinghy's emergency anchor. Now I've got this buoy, which will be working against me. I don't know—"

"I'll fix that." Biff went astern. He pulled in the

dinghy which was tied to the stern of the yawl, hopped in, and cut its anchor.

"Here you are, Li. That cleans us out of dinghy anchors. They go fast on a day like this."

"Marked down. Special sale." Li grinned in reply. He stepped to the side of the yawl. Holding buoy and anchor in front of him, once more the Hawaiian boy jumped feet first into the blue water.

Biff looked at his watch again, but he wasn't worried this time. Li was only going down twenty feet. Feeling quite happy over finding the *Sea Islander*, Biff whistled a popular tune. He looked up at Mauna Loa, wondering where his father might be at the moment. He glanced down at his watch. He couldn't believe his eyes. Unless he had misread the time of Li's submersion, three minutes had already passed.

Biff swiftly went into action. Li shouldn't have taken more than two minutes—not that long—for this dive. Biff's body split the water. He pulled himself downward. The water pressure at the depth of fifteen feet was already exerting abnormal pressure on his chest. Still he pulled himself downward. He had to. *I've got to find Li*, he told himself.

At twenty feet beneath the surface, with his lungs screaming for air, Biff's hands touched Li's head. The Hawaiian boy was fighting frantically to free one leg from a rope entwined around it.

Biff used Li's body to pull himself the four feet

farther downward to reach the rope. He tore at it, felt it give, and Li's leg was free. Biff placed his hands on Li's body and gave it a powerful thrust upward. Then, barely able to hold his breath any longer, he spread his hands, palms downward, pushed with all his might and shot toward the surface.

When Biff broke the surface, gasping for breath, he looked for his friend. There was Li, only a few feet away. But from the position of his head, lolling to one side in the water, Biff knew the boy was unconscious. Tired as he was, his own lungs aching from the recent strain put upon them, Biff swam to Li's side. At first, all he did was support Li's head, keeping his nose and mouth from going under water.

After a few moments, Biff kicked his way to the side of the yawl. He felt the need of support, too. With one hand holding on to the *Easy Action* amidship, he held onto Li with the other. Biff had no way of knowing as yet whether Li had swallowed so much water that his lungs were filled. He kept the word "drowned" out of his mind.

When he had regained his strength, Biff let go of the yawl. Treading water, he took Li's head in both hands and drew it right up to his own face. He placed his cheek against Li's nose.

Thank heavens! He could feel Li's breath on his face.

Biff pulled himself and Li back to the side of the

Easy Action. He placed Li directly against the side of the yawl. He released him and at the same instant, pulled himself quickly onto the deck. Then, belly down, he leaned over and was just able to grasp Li under the arms. With a powerful tug, he pulled the still unconscious boy onto the deck.

His first action was to turn him over and administer first aid. He raised and lowered Li's body to expel any water that might still be in his lungs. Then he placed Li on his side, his face turned toward the deck. He watched Li's troubled breathing become easier.

Biff sank back with a sigh of relief. His friend was going to be all right. A tremendous weariness swept over Biff. He hadn't known how near to the point of exhaustion he had brought himself. For the next half hour, both boys lay on the deck regaining their strength.

The slanting rays of the setting sun were casting long shadows on the slope of the Mauna Loa. Biff sat up. He didn't know at first what had caught his attention. He stared at the side of the volcano. He saw it again. A quick flash, a bright reflection. It disappeared. Biff kept his eyes trained on the spot. There it was again. He turned. The sun was low on the horizon, but still bright. He realized that the *Easy Action* was directly between the setting sun and the flash of reflected light he had spotted.

What could it be? Was it his imagination?

Biff felt Li stir beside him. The Hawaiian boy opened his eyes. A feeble smile touched his lips. He tried to speak.

"Take it easy, Li. Rest a little longer."

Li closed his eyes.

Biff looked again at the spot on the Mauna Loa where he had seen the flash. It came again, then disappeared.

Biff heard Li's faltering voice behind him.

"You saved my life, Biff."

Li was sitting up now. Biff felt embarrassed. What was there to say? He turned to his friend, and the smiles they exchanged expressed more than any words could possibly do.

"What happened, anyway, Li?"

"It was my own fault, Biff. I guess I panicked. I got down easily. Found a loose rope. But I had trouble staying submerged while I tried to tie a knot. So I made a quick slip knot and hooked it over my leg to hold me steady while I tied the knot to fasten the clasp to."

Biff frowned. "You mean you sort of anchored yourself to the *Sea Islander?*"

"Guess you could call it that. Anyway, it took longer than I figured. Once I had hooked the buoy on the rope, I tried to free my leg from the slip knot. My body pulling on the knot had tightened it. The wet rope made the knot even harder to undo. That's

when I panicked, I guess. The more I worked on the knot, the tighter it seemed to get. Then I sort of blacked out. I don't even remember you're coming down to rescue me."

"Thank goodness I got there in time!"

Li put his hands over his face. His shoulders shook. Biff realized the boy was crying. He said nothing. Better to let Li get the shock out of his system. He continued to watch his friend carefully. Li had come close to death.

Li, after a few moments, removed his hands and grinned. "Sorry, Biff, I guess I'm acting like a baby."

"Nonsense. After what you just went through, well — Say, I want you to see if you can see what I just saw—if you can follow all that 'see' and 'saw.' " Biff wanted to change the subject, stop Li from thinking about his narrow escape. He also wanted to check the flash he had just seen.

"Look over there, Li. About two thousand feet up the slope of Mauna Loa." He pointed with his arm. "I'd swear I've just been seeing light reflected. Seems like a mirror pointed into the sun—you know, the way kids sometimes signal to one another."

Li raised his eyes. Both boys saw the reflection come at the same time.

"I see it, Biff. There it is. Now it's gone."

"What do you think it could be, Li?"

"Like you said, maybe a mirror or—or glasses."

"That's it! Glasses. Someone's got binoculars trained on us. And we're right in the path of the setting sun. Someone's watching us through binoculars."

"I'll bet you're right. It's probably my dad and yours."

"Hey, I sure hope so." But even as Biff spoke the words, another idea came into his head. "Or, Li, it could be Perez Soto."

CHAPTER XIX

Reunion

IT WAS Perez Soto.

The swarthy adventurer was standing on a lava ledge not far from the spot where Biff and Li had sighted the sunken hulk of the *Sea Islander* earlier in the day.

Through his powerful binoculars, he had watched every movement the boys had made. He had seen Li's first and second dives. His glasses were of such powerful magnification he could even see the exultant expressions on the boys' faces. He knew they had made an important discovery, and he was certain what the discovery was.

A crafty smile came over his heavy features as a

plan formed in his scheming mind. He would go back to his hideout and get his henchman, Madeira. Then, quickly to his power boat, the *Black Falcon*, and head for the dot on the ocean where he had seen the boys.

He had little thought for Dr. Weber. The thing to do now, and do it fast, was to get out to the sunken *Sea Islander* and stake his salvage claim. In the case of a lost boat, or a sunken one, it was "first come, first served." The important thing, though, was not only to take the claim, but remain in possession of it.

With his glasses still on the *Easy Action*, he saw one of the boys raising the anchor. He saw the yawl set a course toward Ka Lae, leaving the sunken sloop abandoned.

Too bad about Dr. Weber. Maybe someone would find him, maybe they wouldn't. Perez Soto didn't care. All he wanted to do now was to establish his salvage rights, and do so in the shortest possible time.

He stepped back from the ledge and started walking rapidly toward his hideout.

Thomas Brewster and Hanale Mahenili watched with torn emotions as Perez Soto threatened and tormented Dr. Weber. Both men wanted to act. Both knew, however, that to do so would not only endanger the doctor's life, but would also jeopardize their chances of rescuing the old man.

The morning passed. Perez Soto continued his

threats. But the old doctor held firm. He refused to answer any of his captor's questions.

Madeira, Perez Soto's henchman, kept his snub-nosed revolver steadily pointed at the doctor. Brewster and Mahenili didn't dare try to jump the kidnapers.

About noontime, Perez Soto took the gun from Madeira. Madeira prepared some food by lighting a small fire and heating up some stew he took from a can. The smell of the steaming stew rising to the cliff where Brewster and Mahenili were hiding, sent sharp pangs of hunger rumbling through their stomachs.

Shortly after Perez Soto and Madeira had eaten, Perez Soto, as if having an afterthought, poked a spoonful of food at the doctor's mouth. The doctor turned his head away.

"Look at that, Hank," Brewster whispered. "I think the doctor wants to die. He's refusing food."

"Perhaps he feels that death is preferable to any more of Perez Soto's threats and demands."

About two o'clock, Perez Soto entered the cave which he was using for a hideout and emerged minutes later with a pair of binoculars slung over his shoulder.

"Guard the old man well," he ordered. "I'll be back before sunset." He strode off.

Brewster whispered to Mahenili. "I think our chance

will come now. We'll let Perez Soto get well on his way, then we'll find a way of jumping the guard."

The time came more quickly than either man could have hoped for. Madeira, his stomach filled with stew, could be seen to yawn. They saw him shake his head to ward off sleep. Apparently feeling that there was little threat of Dr. Weber's attempting to escape, the guard checked the ropes binding the doctor's hands and feet. He sat down nearby, propping his back against a large boulder, the gun in his hands.

Brewster and Mahenili watched every move. They saw the guard's head nod forward. They saw him bring it up with a jerk and shake his head from side to side in an effort to remain awake. They saw the process repeated. For the third time, the guard's head dropped forward. This time, it stayed there.

"Now's our chance," Brewster said to his friend.

Mahenili nodded in the affirmative.

Brewster measured the distance between himself and the sleeping guard. The drop from the ledge to the ground in front of the cave was a good fifteen feet. From where he would land, Brewster would still have to cross a clearing of ten feet before he could reach the guard. The noise of his landing would certainly arouse the guard. Before Brewster could cross the opening to close with him, the guard would have time to raise his pistol and fire.

A plan shaped up in Thomas Brewster's mind.

"Hank, here's how we'll have to do it. You crawl back. Make your way to the rear of the guard if it's possible. Creep up as near to him as you can. Keep me in sight. When you see me leap from this ledge, you spring forward. Try to take him from the rear. Hurl a rock at him, anything. Just try to give me enough time to leap across that clearing and grapple with the guard before he can fire. Once I get my hands on him, I can handle him."

"But if you can't see me, Tom, how will you know when to leap?"

"It's now two-twenty-two. I'll make my move at exactly two-thirty. I'll just have to trust that you've been able to get behind the guard. Go along now, and good luck."

Brewster kept shifting his glance from the sleeping guard to the minute hand on his watch. It seemed that the large hand would never reach the half-hour mark. But it did.

At exactly two-thirty, Brewster stood up. He jumped. He went to his knees and rolled when he hit the ground, fifteen feet beneath him. It was a fall he had learned in his army training, one designed to prevent a broken ankle.

He leaped quickly to his feet. The guard, awakened, stood up. He was still groggy from sleep and

confused. He could hear sounds from behind him, and here right in front of him, a large man was charging him.

Brewster hit Madeira with a jolting right cross before the guard could think straight. He hit the ground with a thud. Brewster was on top of him like a hungry tiger making a kill. From the rear, Mahenili sprang into the arena, spotted the pistol still in the guard's outstretched hand, and kicked it away.

The fight was over. It had been an easy victory.

In minutes, Dr. Weber was freed, and his bonds were used to truss up the guard. As an extra precaution, Brewster used his handkerchief to gag the guard. He didn't want him calling for help. No telling how near Perez Soto might be.

"Dr. Weber, my friend." Brewster leaned over to help the doctor to his feet. "How are you? Are you injured in any way?"

"Mostly my dignity," the doctor grunted gruffly.

"Are you able to walk? We must get away from here before Perez Soto returns."

"Hurrumph!" the good doctor hurrumphed indignantly. "You youngsters seem to think I'm an old dotard, dying on my feet."

Mr. Brewster had to smile at being called a youngster. But he was a good thirty years younger than Dr. Weber.

"Of course I can walk!" The doctor took two steps, and would have fallen if Biff's father hadn't caught him.

Dr. Weber glared up at his friend. "Release me. All I need is for the circulation to be restored to my legs. I've been tied up most of the time." The doctor was stubborn. He gingerly raised one leg, then the other. He flapped his arms against his sides. He cautiously took another step, glancing out of the side of his eye to see if Tom Brewster was prepared to help him.

The doctor's vitality was amazing. Brewster got him some water. He forced him to take several mouthfuls of the stew, now cold, but energy giving nonetheless.

"All right, now," the doctor said. "You lead the way. I'll follow."

Brewster started off on a path leading down to the coast. Before doing so, he signaled to Mr. Mahenili to stay close behind the doctor, ready to catch him if he should fall.

Their progress downward was slow. Brewster halted every hundred yards, sometimes more often where the descent was difficult, to allow the doctor to regain his strength. Brewster knew Dr. Weber must be going along on sheer nervous energy. His frail body just wasn't young enough to take such punishment. But Biff's father knew also that it is amazing to just

what great limits the human body can go when forced to do so.

It was dusk when the three men stumbled onto the beach opposite the *Easy Action*'s first anchorage. Thomas Brewster looked out over the ocean, and his heart leaped with joy. He saw the yawl coming into its anchorage, Li in the bow, ready to drop the anchor, and Biff at the tiller.

"Hi, Biff! Hi, Li!" he called.

CHAPTER XX

Dawn Attack

SHOUTS of joy rippled across the water from Biff and Li to their fathers. The boys hopped into the dinghy and sent it fairly flying over the waves to shore.

The first thing to do was to get Dr. Weber on the boat. The old man's stout, fierce spirit seemed to leave him once he reached the anchorage. He had exhausted his reserve strength. He was near the end of his remarkable endurance.

The others were ferried to the *Easy Action.* Dr. Weber was bedded down. Hot soup was prepared for the aged scientist, and shortly he was sleeping like a baby, a quite wrinkled baby, true, but his sleep was as sound and peaceful as that of a one-year-old.

Biff quickly filled his father in on what had happened. He saved until the last the discovery of the *Sea Islander.*

"But I think maybe Perez Soto has spotted her, too," Biff had to add in conclusion. "I think he must have spotted us when Li was diving."

Thomas Brewster turned to Mr. Mahenili. "That must have been why Perez Soto went away, giving us the chance to rescue Dr. Weber."

"I'm sure it was," the Hawaiian answered.

"Now what we've got to do is get back to the *Sea Islander* before Perez Soto does. We've got to hook on to the sunken boat somehow. Then we've got to get into her cabin and locate that metal box with the cesium sample and the map showing where the field is located."

Brewster paused. He had to think this thing through clearly now. There could be no mistakes, no more risks. They would have to get a professional diver.

"Hank, where is the nearest town to here—a place where you can hire a professional diver? Someone with an aqualung?"

"I imagine Hilo would be the nearest place."

"How far is that from where we are?"

"Oh, I'd say roughly seventy-five miles."

"Any way of getting there, aside from walking?"

"Sure, Tom. I would have to walk inland until I reached the Wamalahoa Highway—that's the road

which circles the island. I know I could rent a car or taxi at Honupo Landing. Not much more than an hour's drive from there into Hilo."

"Right. What do you say to this? We'll put you ashore right now. You get to Hilo. Hire a skin diver and get back here as early tomorrow morning as you can. We've got to get back to the *Sea Islander* right away. How far up the coast is she, Biff?"

"An hour. Maybe a little more. That's pushing the yawl at full speed."

"All right. Biff, you row Mr. Mahenili ashore. Li and I will make ready. Get back fast."

"Aye, aye, sir." Biff grinned at his father. It was good to have someone else make the decisions for a change. And when Biff's father went into action, he did so with a snap and precision that commanded respect.

It didn't take Biff long to set Mr. Mahenili ashore. The dinghy was quickly secured once the boy returned, and the *Easy Action* headed up coast at full throttle.

"Think we can find the place in the dark, Biff?" his father asked.

"It will take a bit of doing, Dad. But we set a marking buoy over the *Sea Islander*, attached to one of her halyards. Good thing we did, too. We'd never be able to locate a boat on the bottom at night."

It took more time than they had calculated to locate the marking buoy. They had to cruise the area

for more than an hour before a shout from Li told them they had found it.

"Now the problem is," Mr. Brewster said, "how are we going to hook our anchor into the sunken ship? Once we do that, there can be no doubt as to our salvage rights."

"How about this, Dad?" Biff suggested. "Let's drop the hook until we can feel her just touch bottom. Then we can run back and forth over the *Sea Islander* until we feel the anchor's points sink into her side."

"Good. Excellent suggestion." Biff's father acted at once. He brought the *Easy Action* about and aimed her bow directly at the marking buoy. They felt the anchor drag as it struck the submerged sloop. But on their first pass the hook didn't catch. Mr. Brewster reversed his course. This time the hook sunk into the side of the sunken *Sea Islander* and held. Mr. Brewster revved up the engine, and the *Easy Action* tugged at her sunken sister.

"That ought to set the anchor in her side but good," Mr. Brewster said. He cut the engine. "Try the winch, Biff. See if you can raise the anchor. I want to make sure we're really caught onto her."

Biff did so. He put all his strength into trying to turn the winch. The anchor was set. The *Easy Action* and the *Sea Islander* were joined by a stout, thick hawser.

It was late. Everyone, feeling happy about their success, was ready to turn in.

"Tired, Li?" Biff asked. His answer was a quick nod of his friend's head as Li headed below for the comfort of his berth.

"I'm going to sleep on deck again tonight, Dad. Perez Soto's boat is in these waters. I don't think he'll try anything tonight, but you never can tell."

"All right, Biff. I agree. We can't take any chances with success so near at hand."

Biff rolled himself up in a sleeping bag and was asleep the minute he finished zipping it up. Early in the morning, an hour or more before sunrise, he was wide awake. He lay still, staring up at the sky. Stars covered it like a million white dots on a field of navy blue. A quarter moon, looking like an orange section, still hung in the sky.

A soft splash attracted Biff's attention. He rose on one elbow and looked in the direction of the noise. It came again.

"Could be a fish jumping," he told himself. Adjusting his eyes to the night, Biff peered more keenly toward the sound. He raised his glance, and his heart started thudding. Lying at anchor, not more than a quarter of a mile away, was the outline of a power boat. Biff was sure it was the same one which had tried to swamp the *Easy Action.*

Biff crept noiselessly to the stern of the yawl. He

went below. Reaching his father's berth, he shook him gently.

"Dad, Dad," he whispered softly. "Wake up. I think someone's trying to board the boat."

Thomas Brewster was out of his berth in an instant. Li, hearing the noise, leaped out of his bunk, too.

Silently the three crept back to the cockpit. They raised their heads over the gunnel.

"Listen, Dad. Listen carefully. I heard a noise; sounded like a fish jumping. Right over there."

The three strained their ears. They heard the sound again. Then they saw what was causing it. A man was swimming toward the *Easy Action.* They could make out his head moving slowly, but steadily along, coming toward the yawl.

When the swimmer was some twenty feet from the *Easy Action,* the pale light of the moon was reflected by an object the swimmer was holding in his mouth. In the brief instant of the gleam, the object became clear to them all. It was a long knife.

CHAPTER XXI

A Human Fish

"WHAT do you think he is up to, Biff?" Li asked in a whisper.

The swimmer was nearing the yawl.

"With that knife in his mouth, I don't think there's much doubt about it. Do you, Dad?"

"Depends on what you're thinking, son."

"Well, I think this is Perez Soto's last, desperate effort to establish his salvage rights to the *Sea Islander*. I'm sure that's his boat over there, just off our starboard bow. See it?"

The power cruiser, the *Black Falcon*, was sharply silhouetted now in the lightening dawn.

"Perez Soto's sent that swimmer over to cut our an-

chor rope," Biff continued. "Wouldn't you agree, Dad?"

"You're right, Biff."

"Why would he want to do that?" Li asked.

"Well, if his man could cut our line, and we were still asleep, we'd drift. Even in the slight current that runs in these waters, we'd drift half a mile or more in a very short time. Once we were out of the way, he could easily sink his own line onto the *Sea Islander* and establish his rights of salvage."

The swimmer was now only ten feet from the yawl. Biff reached down and pulled out a boathook, a long pole with a hook on one end, used to grab a mooring when coming into an anchorage.

"I'm going to hook me a human fish," he whispered.

Biff raised the boathook. He rested its hooked end on the gunnel. The swimmer was now within hooking distance. Biff shot the boathook out. It grazed the swimmer's head. Feeling it, the swimmer dived. Biff prodded forward with the boathook. He felt it catch. The pole bent just like a fishing pole as the swimmer tried to get away.

"Got him, Dad. Got him!" Biff shouted happily.

"You sure have, Biff. You got him right by the seat of his swimming trunks. Here, let me give you a hand."

Biff pulled the pole, with his human catch on the

other end, partly into the boat. He and his father put their weight onto the in-boat end. The pole became a lever, lifting their catch out of the water.

A funnier catch Biff, his father, and Li had never seen. It was Li who started laughing first.

In the rapidly increasing daylight, they could see Perez Soto's man on the end of the pole. He was waving his arms, kicking his legs frantically.

"He looks like a crab," Li chortled.

He did. The man, caught by the seat of his swim pants on the hook, was unable to reach back to free himself. He was suspended three feet above the water, still kicking and squirming furiously.

"What shall I do with him, Dad? Throw him back?" Thomas Brewster was laughing.

"I've used many a weapon to defend myself in the past, but a boathook . . . this is the laughing end." Both boys made an "ouch" face at the bad pun. Mr. Brewster turned to Li. "Get a flashlight, Li. I want to make sure who this human shark is."

Li darted into the cabin and darted right back. He didn't want to miss a thing.

Thomas Brewster shone the flashlight on the hooked, would-be knife wielder's face.

"Just as I thought," Brewster said. "It's the man who was guarding Dr. Weber. I heard Perez Soto call him Madeira."

Madeira, in his frantic struggling, had dropped the

knife from his mouth. He was no longer any threat to the *Easy Action* and her crew.

"Guess I might as well drop him back in the water, hadn't I, Dad?" Biff asked.

"Sure, son. Let him go. In the water he can free himself. Then you just watch him head back for Perez Soto and the *Black Falcon*."

"You're not serious, Dad!" Biff exclaimed. "Isn't it dangerous to let them get away?"

But Biff didn't have to drop Madeira back into the water. There came a ripping sound. Madeira's hooked swim trunks split. The water prowler hit the water with a belly whopper. Pantless, he turned and swam away.

Biff, Li, and Mr. Brewster howled with laughter. When the laughter died away, Mr. Brewster said, "To answer your question, Biff. They're too dangerous to keep aboard. We'll have to leave them to the authorities. They'll track them down, now."

It had grown much lighter. It was easy to follow the swimmer's progress back to the *Black Falcon*.

"He'll go without his breakfast when he gets back," Tom Brewster said. "Perez Soto will be furious."

"Speaking of breakfast—" Biff said.

"Me, too," Li cut in.

They went below. All hungry. All happy, feeling that they were nearing the climax of their Hawaiian sea hunt.

"Looks like easy sailing from here on in, Dad," Biff said, munching a piece of toast.

"Well, don't get your hopes up too high, Biff."

"Why not, Dad?"

"We still have to locate that metal box. We have no assurance that it's still in the *Sea Islander's* cabin."

A frown of disappointment came over Biff's face.

"I'm not saying it isn't there, understand," his father went on. "But remember, the *Sea Islander* has been on the bottom for several weeks. The box could have been tossed around in the storm that sank the boat. It might have floated out."

"I never thought of that."

The remainder of their breakfast was eaten in a concerned silence.

Biff and Li were cleaning up the galley. Thomas Brewster was talking to Dr. Weber. The doctor had had a good night's sleep and said he was feeling fine. He chortled over the human fish incident.

Biff's sharp ears caught the sound first. From a distance came a low, steady buzzing. Biff ran on deck. From just off Ka Lae, he spotted a low flying plane. It was coming directly at the *Easy Action.* In moments, Biff was able to distinguish its lines.

"Dad, Dad!" he called. "There's a seaplane coming this way."

Li was on deck first, followed by Thomas Brewster and Dr. Weber.

They watched the plane. It came in low over the yawl, dipped its wings in salute, then described a long circle to head into the wind. It settled ducklike on the water and taxied toward the *Easy Action.*

One man stood up in the open cockpit by the pilot. He was waving his arms.

"It's Dad! It's my father!" Li shouted excitedly.

"Well, it surely is. Li, when your father goes into action, he moves fast. I never thought he'd come back in a plane. I thought he'd charter another boat," Mr. Brewster said.

The seaplane taxied to within ten feet of the *Easy Action,* its twin propellers barely turning, just fast enough to give the plane headway. Henry Mahenili stood up and tossed a rope toward the yawl. It fell short. He pulled it in, and again the rope snaked out toward the yawl. This time Biff caught it. He tugged on the rope, and the plane closed the gap of water separating it from the yawl. Its nose bumped gently against *Easy Action's* starboard side.

"Give us about five feet of play, young man," the pilot called out. Even in this calm sea, he didn't want to take any chances on the nose of his plane being punched in.

"I can do better than that," Biff called, knowing the reason for the pilot's concern. He went below and brought out extra boat snubbers, made of foam rubber. He hooked them over the gunnel, forming a soft pro-

tecting barrier between the side of the yawl and the nose of the plane. Then he pulled the plane within two feet of the yawl, making it easy for the plane's passengers to hop from plane to boat.

Hank Mahenili was first aboard. He was followed by a muscularly built Hawaiian. The pilot came last.

"This is Kamuela Mamola, the skin diver I hired," Hank said, introducing the muscular young man.

"Just call me Sammy—that's what my Hawaiian name means. You got a job for me?" the young man said.

"We sure have, Sammy," Mr. Brewster said. "Right downstairs." He laughed.

"That line over the port side," Biff said, indicating the line. "That's our anchor rope. It's caught in the sunken sloop."

"Good," the diver said. "Then there shouldn't be any trouble at all." He hopped back aboard the plane, dug around its cabin for a few minutes, then reappeared with his skin diving equipment. This consisted of a glass face mask, and a small oxygen tank connected to his aqualung.

Coming back on the *Easy Action*, he donned his equipment, touched his hand to his forehead in salute, and slipped overboard.

Biff leaned over the gunnel. He saw the diver pulling himself downward, using the anchor rope to guide

him. It was the same as climbing a rope hand over hand, only in reverse.

Bubbles from the aqualung kept breaking the surface.

"Never thought of this, Hank," Tom said. "No one told Sammy what to look for."

"Oh, yes, they did, Tom. Me. I did. On the way over. I couldn't give him much of a description."

"No, we don't have much to go on. Just some kind of metal box."

"That's what I told him. I imagine it's similar to the small locker-box you keep semi-valuable papers in at home. That's what I told him, anyway."

"We ought to know soon."

Air bubbles dotted the surface near the port side of the *Easy Action.* Five minutes went by. Ten. At fifteen minutes, worry began to appear on the faces of those on board.

"Think anything could have happened to the diver?" Tom Brewster asked.

"No, Dad. Not as long as those bubbles keep coming up regularly. He's all right. If those bubbles stop, we worry."

After twenty minutes, Biff saw the anchor rope tighten, as if someone had pulled it from the other end.

"I think he's coming up," Biff said.

Everyone leaned over the portside of the boat.

Moments later, Sammy's wet head broke the surface. He wrenched the glass face mask from his head.

Disappointment swept over the boat. The diver was empty-handed.

CHAPTER XXII

Check-Out

"Don't look so worried," Sammy Mamola said. The skin diver looked up at the disappointed faces. "I didn't expect to bring up that box on my first dive. Give me a little more time. I do think I may have located it, though."

Expressions of hope replaced the sad faces aboard the *Easy Action.*

"I need another tool," Sammy said. "A short bar, two or three feet long. If what I think is the box, it's jammed, and I can't free it without prizing it. What have you got?"

Sammy was treading water, one hand resting lightly on the yawl's gunnel.

"I'll look in the tool box," Biff said.

While he was gone, Sammy told them what he had found below.

"That boat sure took a beating. Everything in the cabin is smashed up. She's filled with sand, and other sea trash. I had to chase some fish out, too. Especially a small octopus—didn't want it squirting its ink around, clouding my vision. I found what I think may be your box under a mound of sand and broken sea shells. Couldn't pull it out, though."

"Any sign of—"

"No, Mr. Mahenili, no sign of the poor fellow who went down with her."

Biff had returned.

"Will this do?" He held up a metal bar, about three-quarters of an inch thick and thirty inches long. It was used to turn the engine over if its electric starter didn't work.

"Just the thing." Sammy reached up for it. "Well, here I go again. Maybe I'll have better luck this time." The diver submerged again.

All had been so interested in the diver's activities and report that they hadn't noticed the *Black Falcon.* It was Li who spotted Perez Soto's boat.

"Look, Dad," he called out.

The *Black Falcon* had left its anchorage and moved over until it was only two hundred feet from the

Easy Action. Perez Soto was watching every action aboard the yawl.

"Say one thing for that man," Tom Brewster said. "He doesn't give up until the final chance is gone. If he sees us bring up that metal box, he'll still try to get it away from us somehow."

"I don't think he will," Hank Mahenili said.

"What do you mean?" Biff asked.

"You'll see." Hank Mahenili smiled mysteriously.

Another fifteen minutes went by. A steady stream of bubbles broke the surface. The diver was working. Thomas Brewster kept looking at his watch. Biff and Li, lying on their stomachs, watched the area dotted with bubbles. Biff, looking up, noticed Madeira frantically winding up the anchor winch of the *Black Falcon.* Perez Soto was already at the wheel, shouting at his henchman to hurry up.

"Hey, look at that," Biff exclaimed. "Looks like Perez Soto has changed his mind. He's in a hurry to get out of here."

And he was. The anchor of the *Black Falcon* was barely out of the water when Perez Soto jammed the throttle of the cruiser full speed forward, and the boat leaped away, leaving a high, foaming wake at its stern.

"Now I wonder what made him change his mind?" Tom Brewster asked.

"I think I know the answer to that. Look over there." Hank Mahenili said.

They looked in the direction he was pointing. A low, gray boat was coming along at a racing clip. Huge numbers on its bow identified it.

"It's a Coast Guard cutter," Biff shouted.

"That's right, Biff. Now watch. We may see some fun."

The cutter was after the *Black Falcon.* The cruiser was fast, but no match for the Coast Guard cutter. She closed the gap between the boats rapidly.

Perez Soto wasn't giving up, however. He tried maneuvering, swerving the *Black Falcon* from one direction to another on a zigzag course.

The people on the *Easy Action* heard the boom of a small cannon. Looking at the cutter, they saw a puff of smoke from its forward gun. Then they saw a splash as a shell dropped just in front of the *Falcon*'s bow.

"If he doesn't heave to now, the next projectile will be directed at the ship," Mr. Mahenili said.

But Perez Soto had had enough. He heaved to. The cutter came alongside, and two Coast Guardsmen, guns in hand, boarded her.

"I imagine our troubles with Perez Soto are at an end," Mr. Mahenili said.

"This is your doing?" Tom Brewster asked.

Hank nodded his head. "Kidnaping. I reported

Perez Soto as having kidnaped Dr. Weber. He'll be dealt with harshly. One witness against him will be Tokawto. He's recovering. It was Perez Soto who gave him that stab wound."

"Well, you really did get around in Hilo, Mr. Mahenili," Biff said.

"I don't like to leave any loose strings dangling. Incidentally, did Dr. Weber ever tell you how he happened to be abducted from his hotel room?" Hank asked Tom Brewster.

"Yes, he did. He was talking to me when he felt a sharp point in his back. That was the call I took in Indianapolis, Biff. It was Perez Soto. With a sharp knife at his back and Perez Soto threatening to use the knife, there was nothing the doctor could do but obey instructions. They walked out of the porch entrance and through the garden to a waiting car. Madeira was the driver."

Dr. Weber smiled at the group. "Perhaps I should have resisted, but—I knew Perez Soto meant what he said. I went along, like a quiet mouse."

An idea occurred to Biff. He dashed below. He was back in a moment. He held out his hand to Dr. Weber.

"I just remembered this, Doctor."

It was the doctor's tobacco pouch and pipe.

"Bless you, my boy. Missing my pipe was the worst torture I endured during my entire captivity."

A shout came from the side of the yawl.

"You people up there still interested in a metal box?" It was the diver. "Think this could be it?"

The Hawaiian diver held an oblong object above his head. Biff leaned over the side and took it from his hands. It was encrusted with barnacles, bits of shell, and slimy green seaweed.

It was a metal box. Biff handed it to his father.

"Get a screwdriver, Biff. We'll have to pry the lid open."

Everyone watched tensely as Thomas Brewster worked the screwdriver under the lid of the box. A small lock held it shut. Finally, the lid sprang open. Inside was a loose, dust-like substance, hardened in spots where sea water had leaked in. There was also a damp piece of paper.

"This is it. It's got to be. Take a look, Dr. Weber."

The doctor dipped his hand in the box. He fingered the powdery substance. He nodded his head.

"I can't tell how this will run yet. I will have to test it. But . . . well, I think we've really got something here."

Thomas Brewster and Biff were pouring over the map.

"The field's well marked. Won't be any trouble locating it if this sample proves out to be high grade."

The doctor was looking at the pilot.

"Young man, could you fly me back to Honolulu?"

"Sure. Only take an hour or so."

"Well, Tom. I'd like to get back to my hotel. All my equipment is there. I can test this sample immediately. I want to. Is it all right with you, Henry, if I steal your plane and pilot?"

"Certainly, doctor. We'll all go back to Hilo by boat."

"Well then, when you get there, look for a message from me. I'll have run my tests long before you can get back by boat. Then I'm off. I'm due at an international scientific convention in Switzerland early next week. I'll have to leave Honolulu before you get back."

The doctor shook hands all around. His last words to the group were:

"Thanks for my pipe, young man."

Biff grinned in reply. It was hard to believe that this was the same old man who had been carried aboard not long ago.

The doctor boarded the plane, and in five minutes it was out of sight, winging its way to Hawaii.

Tom Brewster took the tiller of the *Easy Action.* Li was at the anchor winch, Biff at the mainmast, and Hank Mahenili at the mizzen.

"Hoist away," Tom Brewster sang out as he felt the anchor pull free.

Sails rattled up their masts. The wind caught them, and the *Easy Action* was put on a course for Hilo.

It was a pleasant sail. Everyone was relaxed. There

was little conversation. All were happy to loll about the deck, resting from their recent near escapes from violence and storm.

It was night by the time Mr. Brewster headed the yawl for a dock in Hilo Bay. The boat was tied up, and in half an hour, the party entered their hotel.

As good as his word, there was a message waiting from Dr. Weber.

"*Sample proves out cesium in purest state discovered thus far in world. Looks like a sky-blue find.*"

Tom Brewster handed the message to Biff. Biff read it and smiled at his father. "Why sky-blue, Dad?"

"Dr. Weber's mild little joke. Cesium means 'sky-blue' because that is how it shows up on a spectrum test."

The boy and his father stood silent for a moment, enjoying this moment of complete peace.

"Dad," Biff said, "this was supposed to be a vacation for Mom and the twins. Can we still make it one for the *whole* family? Have them fly over here and explore this beautiful island?"

"Explore, Biff? Haven't you had enough adventure for now? I'll have them come over. But for the rest of our stay, it's going to be nothing but fun and frolic. You agree?"

"Check, Dad. Check."